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# LIGHTS OF 'IRFÁN

Book Sixteen



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Papers Presented at the 'Irfán  
Colloquia and Seminars

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# Lights of 'Irfán

Studies in the Principal Bahá'í Beliefs

*Papers Presented at the  
'Irfán Colloquia and Seminars*



Book Sixteen



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*Immerse yourselves in the ocean of My words, that ye may unravel its secrets, and discover all the pearls of wisdom that lie hid in its depths. Take heed that ye do not vacillate in your determination to embrace the truth of this Cause—a Cause through which the potentialities of the might of God have been revealed, and His sovereignty established. With faces beaming with joy, hasten ye unto Him. This is the changeless Faith of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future.*

— *Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 118-119

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## Preface

Bahá'ís are advised and urged by the founders of the Bahá'í Faith to engage in deeper study of the Bahá'í Writings, reflecting on them and try to unravel the many inner meanings and the important knowledge hidden in them. Baha'u'llah likens the words of God to an ocean that has precious pearls in its depth. He encourages the believers to swim and even immerse in that ocean in search of those pearls of spiritual realities. Such exercises, among many advantages, deepen our knowledge, consolidate our faith and make us better prepared for propagation and teaching of Bahá'í Faith. 'Irfán Colloquium and its publications aim at promoting deeper and systematic study of the scriptures of the world's religions from the Bahá'í perspective, the verities and fundamental principles of the belief system of the Bahá'í Faith, as well as the interface between the Bahá'í Faith and the various religious traditions and schools of thought. In volumes of *Lights of 'Irfán* collections of research papers either presented at 'Irfán Colloquia or submitted to the 'Irfán Colloquium are published.

In this volume, **Nathan Soderblom and the Bahá'í Faith** is the historical background of how Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths were publicly introduced in Sweden for the first time by Nathan Söderblom in 1907. He was the first Professor of Comparative Religion in Sweden and also the Archbishop and the prime representative of the Christian Church in Sweden. He published a text-book in four volumes on religious texts in Swedish language in 1907, in which he provided a brief and objective description of the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths.

**The Ten Plagues of Exodus in Light of the Bahá'í Writings** mentioned in the Biblical Book of Exodus and known as “*the*

*narrative of the plagues*” has historically been interpreted in two ways. The traditional understanding and as interpreted by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá who offers another understanding of this narrative by explaining only the nature of the first plague. His explanation opens a new perspective on the entire plague narrative. This paper examines the remaining nine plagues through an exploration of how these terms (frogs, lice, flies, diseased livestock, boils, thunder and hail, locusts, darkness, and first born) are used in other contexts in the Bahá’í Writings in order to get a sense of the symbolism that may be contained in these Biblical verses. The paper will close with an examination of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s interpretation of the culmination of the Exodus story: the crossing of the Red Sea.

**Freud’s Transference with the Four States of Bahá’u’lláh** is an attempt to use a statement of Bahá’u’lláh in the Seven Valleys, *“Inwardness and Outwardness, Firstness and Lastness are ... true of thyself,”* that gives us a psychological understanding of what is “true of thyself,” as the “Mother Verse,” and further develops this idea. It argues that the transference concept seems to be correlated with the above statement of Bahá’u’lláh and gives us a psychological understanding of what is *“true of thyself.”*

**Procrustes’ Bed: The insufficiency of secular humanism** deals with a very important issue currently debated in intellectual circles. It aims to prove secular humanism’s inability to accommodate the empirically established universal presence of religion in human nature that undermines secular humanism’s claim to be a viable world-view for mankind. It shows secular humanism’s failure to live up to its self-proclaimed empiricism, unleashes a cascade of consequences that undermines its internal coherence, diminishes its value as a rational argument and leaves the arguments for theism untouched.

**Women and Wisdom in Scripture** discusses the treatment of women in religion and the role played by language in degrading women’s status, the direct and indirect influence of the Bábí

and Bahá'í Faiths in raising awareness about the plight of women and transforming attitudes towards them across the globe, the role of wisdom in scripture and how it has been applied in regard to the question of gender equality, the need for vigilance to prevent past shortcomings from affecting our way of thinking and doing things.

**On Existence and Qualities of The Human of Soul** deals with the question of the existence, nature, and necessity of a human soul. It takes a two-phase approach. It first establishes a rational foundation and then applies the principles established to specific questions such as “Is there a human soul?” In the first phase, science and rationality are compared and their relationship established. In the second phase, a part scientific and part rational methodology is employed to specifically answer the direct and indirect questions about the existence of the human soul. It concludes that the mere fact of comprehension of abstract rational relationships necessitates the existence and assistance of a non-physical entity, the human soul, which provides the power of rational comprehension from outside the physical realm.

**Shoghi Effendi's Translation of Terms Related to Law in Bahá'í Scripture** is an attempt to find out whether there is any pattern within Shoghi Effendi's translation of terms related to the word “law”. The search in the translations of Bahá'u'lláh's writings by Shoghi Effendi resulted in finding about ten Arabic/Persian words that occur in Bahá'í scripture and have been translated by him as “law” or other equivalent terms. His translations appear to be based on contextual purpose and meaning of Persian/Arabic terms.

**Shared Prosperity: How Does That Work?** examines proposals from three sectors – government, global institutions and the third sector – and considers them in the light of principles found in the Bahá'í writings bearing on shared prosperity and poverty eradication.



At Dawn the Friend came to my bed: An early fruit of the Supreme Pen is a provisional translation and a detailed analytical commentary of Bahá'u'lláh's poem which begins with the verse *Saḥar ámad bi bistar-am Yár*, "At dawn the Friend came to my bed," and is one among eight Persian poems signed "Dervish." A Hymn to Love (*Sáqí, bi-dih ábí*) is a provisional translation of another one of Bahá'u'lláh's poems probably belonging to the period of his sojourn in Kurdistan. In this poem the Most Great Spirit is described first as Water and Fire, and then as Love itself. Many verses are devoted to a description of Love and of its impact on human hearts and on the world.

The section on **Elucidation** contains the message of the Universal House of Justice of 24 July 2013 on **Intellectual Life and the Future of Bahá'í Studies** addressed to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada. It provides a new vision and a set of guidelines for activities such as those of the Associations of Bahá'í Studies.

The **In Memoriam** section in this volume pays tribute to one of the first and steadfast supporters of the 'Irfán Colloquium, Dr. Kamran Ekbal, who passed away in 2014. Dr. Ekbal made a number of research-based presentations, over the past twenty years, at the 'Irfán Colloquium sessions held in Persian, English and German languages. We also lost another sincere contributor to the English programs of the 'Irfán Colloquium held at Bosch Bahá'í School, Mr. James Thomas. Unfortunately, we have so far been unable to find biographical information on Mr. Thomas.

Appendix I is the **Bibliography of Bahá'í Writings and Their Abbreviated titles** used in the text of the papers published in this book, to facilitate referring to the sources of the quoted statements.

**Appendix II, Contents of Previous Volumes of *Lights of 'Irfán***. Listing the contents of previous volumes also shows the range, types, methodological approaches and scope of the

papers that are presented, and are welcome to be presented, at the ‘Irfán Colloquia. In addition to the papers presented at the ‘Irfán Colloquia, research papers related to the main goals of the ‘Irfán Colloquium are welcome to be directly submitted for publication in the *Lights of ‘Irfán*.

Starting with Book Six, we have made two changes to the ‘Irfán Colloquia’s style guide. All “authoritative” publications are cited by an abbreviation; see Appendix II, “Bibliography of the Bahá’í Writings and Their Abbreviations Used in This Book.” Words of Prophets/Manifestations, i.e. quotations from Sacred Writings, (not including statements by Shoghi Effendi or the Universal House of Justice), are italicized.

All papers published in this book, present the views and understanding of their authors. The texts of the papers are published as provided by the authors. Their writing styles and scholarly approaches are, therefore, different. Articles are published in this volume according to the alphabetical order of the authors’ surnames.

— Iraj Ayman

# The Ten Plagues of the Exodus in Light of the Bahá'í Writings

JoAnn M. Borovicka

The biblical narrative of the ten plagues is one of the most memorable accounts in the Hebrew Bible<sup>1</sup> and plays a central role in the larger story of the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt under the leadership of Moses. While traditionally assumed to be a record of ancient history, research in archaeology as well as studies in ancient literature over the past century report a lack of extra-biblical evidence of the Exodus events. This is of interest to Bahá'ís because the Central Figures<sup>2</sup> of the Bahá'í Faith mention elements of the Exodus in Their Writings. Questions arise: how are we to understand the Bahá'í references to the Exodus? Are the Central Figures using superhuman knowledge to confirm the historical accuracy of some elements of the Exodus story, or is there another explanation? Is belief in the historicity of the Exodus important in the Bahá'í Faith? The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that the historical accuracy of the Exodus story is not essential to a Bahá'í appreciation of that scripture. To this end, it will review the story of the Exodus, look at a sample of scholarship regarding the historicity of the Exodus in general and the ten plagues specifically, examine a selection of Bahá'í teachings regarding ancient scripture, and explore possibilities on the contemporary significance of the story of the ten plagues in light of the Bahá'í Writings.

The setting of the Exodus narrative is generally dated to the thirteenth century B.C. in the Nile Delta area of Egypt.<sup>3</sup> As presented in the Book of Exodus the Israelites, who had come

as immigrants to Egypt about four hundred years earlier, were under the control of a tyrannical Pharaoh<sup>4</sup> who kept them in forced labor. Despite this treatment, the Israelites strengthened and multiplied. Pharaoh, noting their strength and numbers, became fearful of an uprising and consequently ordered the murder of all baby boys born to Israeli women. From this oppression arose the heroic figure of Moses.

Speaking from the Burning Bush, God commissioned Moses to confront Pharaoh and deliver the Israelites from Egypt. Pharaoh responded by increasing the people's workload. After another refusal by Pharaoh, God, through Moses, smote the land with a series of ten plagues: the Egyptian waters turning into blood; an invasion of frogs; gnats as numerous as the dust; swarms of flies; diseased livestock; festering boils on people and animals; thunder, fire and hail; an invasion of locusts; three days of darkness; and the death of every Egyptian firstborn.<sup>5</sup>

After the last plague, Pharaoh agreed to release the Israelites, who were then led by Moses out of Egypt by way of the Red (Reed<sup>6</sup>) Sea. The refugees had travelled just a few days when Pharaoh changed his mind and set out with his army and charioteers to retrieve them. As the Egyptian forces approached, Moses stretched His hand over the sea, the water parted, and the Israelites crossed through this dry passage. When the Egyptians pursued, Moses stretched His hand over the sea once more, the waters closed, and all of the Egyptian forces were drowned. Thus, the Israelites escaped oppression in Egypt and Moses continued to lead the people through the wilderness toward the Land of Canaan – roughly present day Israel.<sup>7</sup>

The story of the Exodus has endured well over two thousand years<sup>8</sup> and is commemorated annually by the Jewish holiday of Passover. But does it represent historical fact? Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl,<sup>9</sup> a renowned Near Eastern scholar of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, points out the lack of evidence of any of the Exodus events up to that time. He states, "No trace has been found of

Moses' mission to the Israelites, their plea for salvation from Pharaoh's tyranny through Moses' leadership, or their emigration to the plains of Syria under his standard."<sup>10</sup> He says that "those with insight" should note this lack of evidence:

For it is unimaginable that the Egyptians, who depicted on walls every event, great or small, and inscribed in stone everything that happened in Egypt, whether temporal or religious in nature, should have neglected to mention such extraordinary and stupendous occurrences as Moses' demonstration of amazing signs and the drowning of Pharaoh and his huge army.<sup>11</sup>

Since the time of Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl much has been learned about the history of the ancient Israelites, but evidence regarding the Exodus is still lacking. As recently stated by the eminent Egyptologist Donald B. Redford, the entire Exodus story "remains the most elusive of all the salient events of Israelite history. The event is supposed to have taken place in Egypt, yet Egyptian sources know it not."<sup>12</sup> While the general situation of immigrants being conscripted into forced labor in the delta region of ancient Egypt is verified, extra-biblical evidence of a large group of Israelites in Egypt, the ten plagues, or the movement of the Israelites from Egypt to the Land of Canaan is lacking.<sup>13</sup> Eric H. Cline, professor of ancient history and archeology at George Washington University, states, "there is currently virtually nothing that sheds a specific light on the historicity of the Exodus — all is inference so far."<sup>14</sup> Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, both noted archaeologists and historians, describe the rigorous Egyptian monitoring and record-keeping of the Egypt/Canaan border at the calculated time of Moses and point out the unlikelihood of an unrecorded mass escape:

The border between Canaan and Egypt was thus closely controlled. If a great mass of fleeing Israelites had passed thorough the border fortifications of the

Pharaonic regime, a record should exist. Yet in the abundant Egyptian sources describing the time of the New Kingdom in general and the thirteenth century in particular, there is no reference to the Israelites, not even a single clue. We know of nomadic groups from Edom who entered Egypt from the desert. The Merneptah stele refers to Israel as a group of people already living in Canaan. But we have no clue, not even a single word, about Israelites in Egypt: neither in monumental inscriptions on walls of temples, not in tomb inscriptions, nor in papyri. Israel is absent – as a possible foe of Egypt, as a friend, or as an enslaved nation.<sup>15</sup>

The eventual settlement of the Israelites in the Land of Canaan is historical fact.<sup>16</sup> The Israelites enslavement in or mass escape from Egypt has not been confirmed. Considering this lack of empirical evidence in Egypt as well as other information gleaned through study of extra-biblical texts and extensive archaeological research in Israel,<sup>17</sup> the story of the Exodus is, in many circles, thought of as “not a miraculous revelation, but a brilliant product of the human imagination . . . woven together from an astonishingly rich collection of historical writings, memories, legends, folk tales, anecdotes, royal propaganda, prophecy, and ancient poetry” sometime in the sixth or seventh century B.C.<sup>18,19</sup> Today, among biblical scholars, the Exodus narrative is often referred to as one of “the founding myths of Israel.”<sup>20</sup>

While the historical record thus far indicates a lack of evidence of the Exodus events, there have been many attempts to prove the physical truth of the ten plagues through the earth sciences. Some of these ‘natural cause’ theories have taken on an aura of fact as they have become popularized by television documentaries. Velikovsky’s hypothesis, the earliest of the natural cause theories, proposes that the series of plagues was initiated by a comet passing too close to earth.<sup>21</sup> Another

suggests that the plagues were initiated by the concurrent flooding of the Nile, a red tide of algae, and widespread anthrax infection.<sup>22</sup> The medical team of Marr and Malloy suggest the possibility that *Pfiesteria*, a toxic microorganism fatal to fish, contaminated the Nile and caused widespread havoc.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps the most popular proposal, the Thera Theory, places the cause of the plagues on two ancient volcano eruptions on the Greek Island of Thera (present day Santorini) in the Aegean Sea.<sup>24</sup>

While the details of the natural cause theories vary, in general they propose a domino-like series of catastrophes such as: a weather anomaly causing poisoned water resulting in dead fish; frogs escaping the water and invading the land; a consequent overgrowth of gnats, flies, and locusts; pollution of the food supply resulting in disease; and (in some theories) human sacrifice of the firstborns in an effort to appease the gods who were blamed for all the chaos, thereafter remembered as the death of the firstborns. Some theories include a parting of the waters caused by a tsunami initiated by post-volcanic seismic forces.<sup>25</sup>

The common theme of the various natural cause explanations is that the plagues and the parting of the waters were caused by a sequence of natural events that may or may not have been intentionally initiated by God Himself. However, despite the popularity of these theories, definite proof is still not forthcoming.<sup>26</sup> Refuting the natural cause model, physicist and theologian Mark Harris, University of Edinburgh's Lecturer on Science and Religion, states, "considerable scholarship, both scientific and biblical . . . indicate that this model cannot be reasonably sustained."<sup>27,28</sup> To date, there is no conclusive evidence of the Exodus events in the historical records disclosed by archaeology, the study of ancient Near Eastern literature, or the earth sciences.

The lack of evidence of the Exodus events in the historical record is noteworthy. But how important should the extra-biblical historical record be to the Bahá'í community in its

understanding of the story? According to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the historical record is important and can be used as an indicator of whether biblical verses should be understood literally or symbolically. In response to a question about the historicity of certain other biblical events,<sup>29</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states, “*As these events have not been recorded in any history, it is evident that they are not to be understood literally but according to their inner meaning.*” [SAQ 44] In light of this guidance, it follows that Bahá’ís should look for inner meaning in the Exodus narrative as, to date, the historicity of these events has not been corroborated by extra-biblical records. Indeed, seeking spiritual truth without being attached to the necessity of having a literal interpretation is a fundamental principle in a Bahá’í approach to the Bible. As explained in a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi: “When ‘Abdul-Bahá states we believe what is in the Bible, He means in substance. Not that we believe every word of it to be taken literally or that every word is the authentic saying of the Prophet.” [LOG 494] Therefore, the possibility that the Exodus narrative is not journalistic history and that one should focus on its allegorical meanings is consistent with Bahá’í teachings.

In the process of investigating the symbolic nature of the Exodus narrative, it is fascinating, even a little surprising, to see that all of the Central Figures of the Bahá’í Faith mention a key element of the story – the enslavement of the Israelites under a tyrannical Pharaoh – in Their Writings.<sup>30</sup> For example, in a commentary on the Mosaic Dispensation in *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states, “*The enslavement . . . of the Hebrews was such that they were not able to provide any defense for their wives and families against the tyranny of their Pharaonic captors.*” [SDC 75] How is this reference, and others similar to it, to be understood? Does mention of an Exodus event in the Writings of the Central Figures of the Faith indicate its literal truth, or is there another way to interpret these references? How are Bahá’ís to understand it when the



Central Figures mention a biblical story that modern scholars largely identify as parable – not fact?

Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl addresses this question directly by explaining that the Prophets often speak to the traditional understandings of the people. He states:

[T]he prophets have indulged the people in regard to their historical notions, folk stories, and scientific principles, and have spoken to them according to these. They conversed as was appropriate to their audience and hid certain realities behind the curtain of allusion. . . .

Finally, it is well known that neither the Prophet Muhammad nor the rest of the Prophets ever engaged in disputes with the people about their historical beliefs, but addressed them according to their local traditions.<sup>31</sup>

Addressing students ‘where they are’ in the process of moving them forward is a universal method of effective teachers and one described by Bahá'u'lláh as a strategy of the Divine Educator. He states, “*All that I have revealed unto thee with the tongue of power, and have written for thee with the pen of might, hath been in accordance with thy capacity and understanding, not with My state and the melody of My voice.*” [AHW #67] Knowing that the Prophets speak to the capacities of the people includes awareness that the words of the Prophets are not limited to cultural connotations. The Universal House of Justice states:

Although, in conveying His Revelation, the Manifestation uses the language and culture of the country into which He is born, He is not confined to using terminology with the same connotations as those given to it by His predecessors or contemporaries; He delivers His message in a form which His audience, both immediate and in centuries to come, is capable of grasping. [8 February 1998]

Cultural connotations could be literal understandings as well as other culturally imposed perceptions. Considering the above guidance, it follows that when the Central Figures of the Faith draw on the imagery of a biblical story in Their teachings additional information may be required to determine if that event is historical fact or cultural tradition.

An examination of the complete passage from *The Secret of Divine Civilization* previously mentioned offers additional information which suggests that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is conforming to the audience’s traditional understandings of the Exodus. Before His commentary on the Israelites captivity under a tyrannical Pharaoh and their movement from Egypt to the Promised Land, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states,

*The events that transpired at the advent of the Prophets of the past, and Their ways and works and circumstances, are not adequately set down in authoritative histories, and are referred to only in condensed form in the verses of the Qur’án, the Holy Traditions and the Torah. . . . To preclude once and for all objections on the part of any of the world's peoples, We shall conduct Our discussion conformably to those authoritative accounts which all nations are agreed upon. [SDC 75]*

If historical happenings are “not adequately set down” but “condensed” to essential meanings, it may be possible that the final product could be mythology, legend, parable, fable, poetry, or any number of literary forms suitable for conveying higher significances to the heart. However reliably these figurative forms of language may communicate significant meanings, they may or may not express historical facts. Also, considering ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statement that He is reviewing the story of the Israelites “conformably” to that which is generally agreed upon, it is important to note that this commentary was written in 1875 which was just at the dawn of higher biblical criticism (the application of analytical measures to biblical

texts).<sup>32,33</sup> At that time it was largely thought that Moses wrote the Torah and that it represented historical fact. Indeed, Finkelstein and Silberman report that until the 1970s even the science of archaeology in the land of the Bible was driven by an acceptance of the narratives of the Torah “at face value”.<sup>34,35</sup>

After this introduction, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá mentions the Israelites’ captivity in Egypt and eventual movement toward the Promised Land in a manner that directs the reader’s focus to the spiritual essence of the story: the Divine guidance of the Manifestation, the enlightenment of the people, and the evolution of unity. For example, He states:

*In the midst of the Israelites, He [Moses] blazed out like a lamp of Divine guidance, and by the light of salvation He led that lost people out of the shadows of ignorance into knowledge and perfection. He gathered Israel's scattered tribes into the shelter of the unifying and universal Word of God, and over the heights of union He raised up the banner of harmony, so that within a brief interval those benighted souls became spiritually educated, and they who had been strangers to the truth, rallied to the cause of the oneness of God, and were delivered out of their wretchedness, their indigence, their incomprehension and captivity and achieved a supreme degree of happiness and honor. [SCD 76]*

The above passage engages the imagery of the Exodus while simultaneously widening the concept of ‘captivity’ by equating bondage with conditions of the mind and the spirit, such as ignorance – thereby making this element of the Exodus story universally relevant.<sup>36</sup> It also confirms the spiritual transformation engendered by the Mosaic Dispensation in the general context of the Exodus narrative without focusing on historical details that require literal interpretation.

In light of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statement that He was conducting His discussion of the Israelites development under Moses

“conformably” to what was “agreed upon”, His focus on the inner meaning of the captivity of the Israelites in the same passage, His guidance that lack of evidence in the historical record indicates that biblical scripture should be understood for its inner (not literal) meaning, and the lack of evidence of the Exodus events in the historical record to date, I propose that when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá mentions the Israelites enslavement under a tyrannical Pharaoh He is not giving a history lesson – He is giving a spiritual lesson delivered through the imagery of a cultural tradition.

In addition, given Bahá’u’lláh’s statement that the Manifestation of God speaks according to the capacity of the people, and also taking into account the elucidation by the House of Justice that cultural connotations cannot be assumed in the words of the Manifestation, I would propose that it would not be unreasonable to understand Bahá’u’lláh’s and the Báb’s occasional mention of the Israelites’ captivity under Pharaoh in the same symbolic manner.

When asked why symbolism was such an integral part of religious scripture, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained,

*Divine things are too deep to be expressed by common words. The heavenly teachings are expressed in parable in order to be understood and preserved for ages to come. When the spiritually minded dive deeply into the ocean of their meaning they bring to the surface the pearls of their inner significance. [ABL 79]*

One wonders about the inner significances of the ten plagues – this ancient story that continues to engage imaginations over two thousand years after its composition. Fortunately, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá provides an authoritative interpretation for the first plague of waters turning into blood.<sup>37</sup> His explanation comes in an unexpected context – the section of *Some Answered Questions* entitled “Commentary on the Eleventh Chapter of the Revelation of John” (the last book of the New Testament).

Throughout this commentary, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains how the eleventh chapter of the Book of Revelation foretells events in the Dispensation of Muhammad. Revelation 11:6 draws on the imagery of water turning to blood. In the process of interpreting this verse, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also unveils an interpretation of the first plague of the Exodus:

*“And have power over waters to turn them to blood.”*  
 [Rev 11:6] *This means that the prophethood of Muhammad was similar to that of Moses, and the power of ‘Alí like that of Joshua. That is, it was in their power, had they so desired, to turn the waters of the Nile into blood for the Egyptians and the deniers – or, in other words, to turn, in consequence of their ignorance and pride, that which was the source of their life into the cause of their death. Thus the sovereignty, wealth, and power of Pharaoh and of his people, which were the source of that nation’s life, became, as a result of their opposition, denial, and pride, the very cause of their death, ruin, destruction, degradation, and wretchedness. Hence these two witnesses have power to destroy nations.* [SAQ 58]

From this explanation it can be understood that the Nile, in all aspects the water of life to the Egyptians, symbolizes the traditional source of sovereignty, wealth, and power that became outdated with the appearance of the Mosaic Revelation. This same dynamic repeated itself with the appearance of the Muhammadan Revelation as prophesied in the Book of Revelation. In Abdu’l-Bahá’s explanation, the spoiling of the river is symbolic of the way that denying the Manifestation of God and holding onto outdated forms of sovereignty, wealth, and power can be oppressive. Archetypal truth is expressed in figurative terms as waters turning to blood.

While direct explanations for the other nine plagues are not found in the Bahá’í Writings,<sup>38</sup> examining the plague terms as

they are used in other contexts in the Writings can inform personal reflection and help lovers of the plague narrative to discover spiritual meanings for themselves. For example, the following statement by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá where He compares rumormongers with the “croaking of frogs” and the “buzzing of flies” inspires ideas of what the plagues of frogs and flies may symbolize today:

*Verily, I, through the grace of my Lord, have never heeded these souls, even to reading their articles, inasmuch as their articles signify no other than the buzzing of flies to the hearing of an eagle, or the croaking of a frog of the material world to the ears of the leviathan of the sea of the Kingdom. Is it to be considered as anything? No, by no means! Verily, the eagle soareth high in the supreme apex while the flies rumble in the lowest rubbish. [TAB2 349]*

Along the same vein, the plague of gnats comes to mind in Bahá’u’lláh’s encouragement to not become disheartened by the peoples of the world who are “filled with dismay”:

*Take heed lest Thou falter on that Day when all created things are filled with dismay; rather be Thou the revealer of My name, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting. Assist Thy Lord to the utmost of Thine ability, and pay no heed to the peoples of the world, for that which their mouths utter is like unto the droning of a gnat in an endless valley. [SLH 10]*

The plague of lightening, thunder, and hail becomes something more than violent weather when considered through ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s interpretation of these images in a New Testament verse:

*“And there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail” [Revelation 11:19], meaning that after the appearance of*

*the Book of the Testament there will be a great storm, and the lightnings of the anger and the wrath of God will flash, the noise of the thunder of the violation of the Covenant will resound, the earthquake of doubts will take place, the hail of torments will beat upon the violators of the Covenant, and even those who profess belief will fall into trials and temptations.* [SAQ 69-70]

Similarly, the plague of darkness takes on fresh meaning when one considers Bahá'u'lláh's teaching that God's purpose in sending His Prophets unto men is "*first is to liberate the children of men from the darkness of ignorance, and guide them to the light of true understanding.*" [GWB 79]

Reflection on a sample of the plagues in light of the above Bahá'í quotations demonstrates the value of focusing on inner meanings. Instead of one-time frogs, flies, gnats, darkness, lightning, thunder, and hail that may or may not have caused mayhem three thousand years ago, these afflictions become powerful symbols in an easy-to-remember story that reminds us of the ultimate futility of falsehood and dismay, the dangers of the violation of the Covenant, the inevitability of doubts and temptations, and the suffering caused by ignorance. There is no need to argue about whether or not the plagues happened three thousand years ago — these are things that plague us today.

While the above Bahá'í quotations may inspire ideas about the spiritual meanings of the plagues, the suggested interpretations are not offered as a primitive exegesis. We may never know the intent of the storytellers who passed on the images of the plagues, or know how later editors and redactors understood them — and that is perfectly acceptable because reading the Bible is not all about historical context. Noted theologian Gerald L. Bruns points out that, "The whole orientation of Scripture is toward its future, not toward its past."<sup>39</sup> One of the greatest values of pondering the inner meanings of biblical Scripture is not necessarily to focus on the

context of ancient cultures, but to nurture the heart today and tomorrow. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states:

*All the texts and teachings of the holy Testaments have intrinsic spiritual meanings. They are not to be taken literally. I, therefore, pray in your behalf that you may be given the power of understanding these inner real meanings of the Holy Scriptures and may become informed of the mysteries deposited in the words of the Bible so that you may attain eternal life and that your hearts may be attracted to the Kingdom of God. [PUP 459]*

More historical information concerning the physical journeys and circumstances of the Israelites in the early days of the Mosaic Dispensation may be discovered by archaeology and other disciplines in the future, or may be lost to time, but the Bahá’í Writings indicate that inner meanings related to the Mosaic Dispensation live in the biblical story. Whether or not the details are confirmed in the historical record, the Bahá’í Writings acknowledge the biblical text as a spiritual guide to the Kingdom.

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>. The Hebrew Bible correlates in general to the Old Testament of the Christian Bible.
- <sup>2</sup>. The Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith are Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá.
- <sup>3</sup>. Killebrew, p. 151.

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4. The Pharaoh is not named. According to Fokkelman, “Pharaoh” is probably an emblematic title meant to encompass all of the Egyptian kings who exploited generations of Israelites in the Exodus story (Fokkelman, p. 59).
  5. The ten afflictions are variously referred to as signs and wonders, plagues, and blows (Houston, p. 73).
  6. Hebrew *Yam Suph*; that is, Sea of Reeds (Exodus 15:4 NIV, note a.).
  7. Biblical and historical terms for this land area include Land of Canaan, the Promised Land, the Holy Land, Palestine, Israel and Judah, the State of Israel, and the Southern Levant. Biblical boundaries of this land area vary. See Genesis 15, Exodus 23, Numbers 34, and Ezekiel 47.
  8. The current understanding based on the Documentary Hypothesis is that the Book of Exodus was created from a variety of materials through a long two-stage process of authorship. One source (referred to as J or Jawist/Yawist) composed the bulk of the work probably in the sixth or seventh century B.C. The second (P or Priestly) author expanded on the story in the late sixth or fifth century B.C. (Houston 68). For more information on the Documentary Hypothesis see Friedman 1987, 2005.
  9. Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl-i-Gulpáygání: “The most outstanding scholar of the Bahá’í Faith”; lived at the time of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá; named one of the nineteen Apostles of Bahá’u’lláh by Shoghi Effendi (Momen, pp. 6-7).
  10. Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl-i-Gulpáygání, p.15.
  11. *ibid.* p. 16.
  12. Redford, p. 408.
  13. Finkelstein and Silberman, pp. 52-54.
  14. Cline, p. 92.
  15. Finkelstein and Silberman, pp. 59-60.
  16. For example, the Merneptah stele indicates the existence of a people referred to as “Israel” in the Land of Canaan at the very end of the thirteenth century B.C.; archaeological evidence shows signs of a distinct Israelite presence in the Land of Canaan in the Iron Age; the Tel Dan inscription shows evidence of the existence of the House of David in the ninth century (Finkelstein and Silberman, pp. 57, 118-119, 129).
  17. Extensive archaeological research in Israel over the past thirty years reveals a story that differs from the Hebrew Bible – that being the gradual emergence of the Israelite tribes from within the Land of Canaan. In the words of Finkelstein and Silberman, “There was no mass Exodus from Egypt. There was no violent conquest of Canaan” (Finkelstein and Silberman, p. 118). It is noteworthy that Israel Finkelstein, one of the authors of this statement, is the past Director of the Sonia and Marco Nadler Institute of Archaeology at Tel Aviv University, the leading

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archaeologist of the Levant, and a recipient of the 2005 international Dan David Prize – a one million USD award for achievement that “expands knowledge of former times” (DanDavidPrize.org).

<sup>18</sup>. Finkelstein and Silberman, p. 2.

<sup>19</sup>. On the topic of the writing of the Book of Exodus, also see Redmond, pp. 408-422; Friedman, pp. 7-31, 119-189; Houston, 67-68; Schniedewind, 118-138.

<sup>20</sup>. Wright, p. 161; Meyers, p. 81-82.

<sup>21</sup>. Velikovsky.

<sup>22</sup>. Hort, pp. 84-103.

<sup>23</sup>. Marr and Malloy, pp. 16-24.

<sup>24</sup>. “The Ten Plagues of the Bible.”

<sup>25</sup>. Trevisanato, pp. 9-59; Booyson, 289-309.

<sup>26</sup>. Cline, p. 93.

<sup>27</sup>. Harris, p. 21.

<sup>28</sup>. For example, the Thera hypothesis suffers in that it is now known that the eruption was much less violent and occurred much earlier than what was originally assumed by theorists. (Harris, pp. 18-21).

<sup>29</sup>. Matthew 27:51-53.

<sup>30</sup>. For example: Bahá’u’lláh, ESW 63; Bahá’u’lláh, KI 63; The Báb, SWB 26; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, SDC 74-76; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, SAQ 17.

<sup>31</sup>. Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl-i-Gulpáygání, pp. 9, 14.

<sup>32</sup>. Walton, p. 15-17.

<sup>33</sup>. For a study of the value of higher biblical criticism in light of the Bahá’í Writings, see Stockman, pp. 107-114.

<sup>34</sup>. Finkelstein and Silberman, p. 21.

<sup>35</sup>. Divine authorship of the Bible is still a popular view. In the 1996 Gallup pole it was reported that 35% of Americans believed that the Bible is the literal and inerrant word of the Creator of the universe (Gallup, 1996).

<sup>36</sup>. The concept of captivity as a condition of the soul is a prominent theme in the Bahá’í Writings. Bahá’u’lláh states, “*He is indeed a captive who hath not recognized the Supreme Redeemer, but hath suffered his soul to be bound, distressed and helpless, in the fetters of his desires*” [GWB 169].

<sup>37</sup>. Exodus 7:19-21.

<sup>38</sup>. That is, at this time, this writer has not found direct interpretations of biblical plagues two through ten in the Bahá’í Writings that are available to her in English.

<sup>39</sup>. Bruns, p. 629.

# Freud's Transference and the Four States of Bahá'u'lláh

Wolfgang A. Klebel

As in several previous contribution of this writer in the "Lights of 'Irfán," the understanding of a central Verse from the "Valley of Unity" of Bahá'u'lláh's Seven Valleys is at the core of this article. In this verse Bahá'u'lláh talked about something that is fundamentally *True of Thyself* and developed a structure that was called tetrarchic by this writer. (Emphasis and sentence structure was added by this writer)

*And thus*

*firstness and lastness, outwardness and inwardness*

*are, in the sense referred to,*

*true of thyself,*

*that in these four states conferred upon thee*

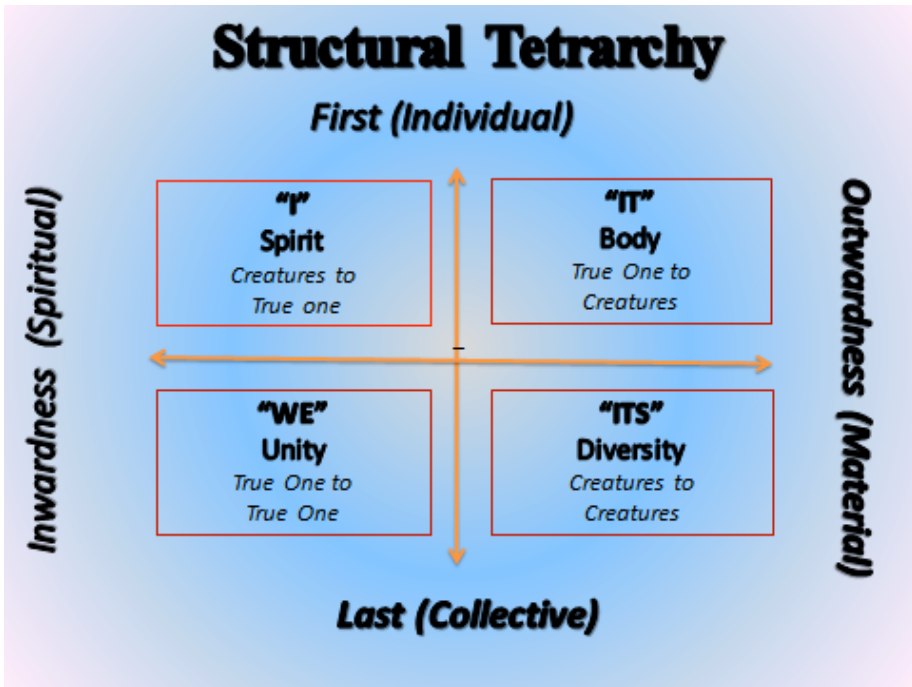
*thou shouldst comprehend the four divine states*

[SVFV 27, emphasis by this writer]

These four states have been called tetrarchic, which is a term that was coined to describe this structure and was modeled from an originally Greek word used in a new sense. It can be organized in this structure and the Wilberian concepts of 'I', 'We', 'It' and 'Its' can be put in the respective places and the opposites of Spirit versus Body and Unity versus Diversity can be added.

The four journeys in the pathway of love have been added in these four areas as well as many other structures from the Bahá'í Writings fit this tetrarchic form.

*The journeys in the pathway of love are reckoned as four: From the creatures to the True One; from the True One to the creatures; from the creatures to the creatures; from the True One to the True One. [SVFV 25]*



### Tetrarchic Understanding of Reality

Considering that answers reaching into the depth of being are complex, are transcending simple logic or straight forward thinking, the process of thinking about such answers needs to be explored as well. With this thought, we come to the special aspect of this study, the fact we talk about a tetrarchic structure.

Tetrarchy is a Greek word from history, “*tetras*” meaning four and “*arche*” meaning beginning, principle, prince or ruler. The meaning of *arche*, which is found in words like archeology or archaic, is described in the Wikipedia:

*Arche* (Ancient Greek: ἀρχή) is a Greek word with primary senses ‘beginning’, ‘origin’ or ‘first cause’. Later, ‘power’, ‘sovereignty’, ‘domination’ were also accepted as extended meanings. ... In the language of the archaic period (8th-6th century BC) *arche* (or *archai*) designates the source, origin or root of things that exist. In ancient Greek Philosophy, Aristotle foregrounded the meaning of *arche* as the element or principle of a thing, which although indemonstrable and intangible in itself, provides the conditions of the possibility of that thing.

In this article the word tetrarchy – or consisting of four principles, modes or causes – is mostly used in the meaning of the Greek word “*Arche*” ascribed to Aristotle, as presented above, “as the element or principle of a thing, which although indemonstrable and intangible in itself, provides the conditions of the possibility of that thing.” The four principles of the tetrarchy have to be understood in this way, they are the elements or modes of reality, they are the condition of the possibility of reality and the condition of every reality, while reality is always seen as what actually and concretely exists. They explain how to understand concrete reality. In their unity reality becomes understandable in its diversity. This is similar as in traditional Aristotelian philosophy; reality or being was described as the true, the good, and the beautiful.

There are several important and new ideas combined in this tetrarchic idea. The most important are based on the concept of Complementarity in Niels Bohr’s quantum mechanics, of Polar Opposites in Romano Guardini’s “Gegensatz” philosophy, and the Four Quadrants in Ken Wilber’s Integral Psychology, all of which have been presented in previous articles of this author in the “Lights of Írfán.” Here the connection between the

complementary and polar concepts, as well as the connection between the four quadrants or the four principles in the tetrarchic system will be addressed.

These connections will be further explained by including the Freudian concept of transference into the understanding of reality. Reality is then understood as a process to indicate the underlying unity in the polar and fourfold tetrarchies of being, of reality, and of the self. Finally this study will give us some insight into the way God is represented in the mind according to psychoanalytic understanding. This correlation of a Freudian concept with the Bahá'í Writings is unexpected to say the least. Additionally, this fact can give a psychological explanation of how the child acquires the first idea about God which is another benefit of this approach.

First the Freudian transference concept will be presented here and it will be shown that it has an intrinsic tetrarchic structure that was not described directly by Freud. Nevertheless, it can be inferred from his writings, because what Freud said about transference and its aspects leads towards this conclusion, which Freud could not make because of his "scientific" prejudices and his methodological reductionism. The difference between what Freud found in his analytic treatment of his patients and what he could systematically describe in his meta-psychology is quite significant and was described by this author in his dissertation,<sup>1</sup> more than 30 years before he developed the concept of tetrarchies as a way of understanding reality. The following is quoted from this dissertation on transference and culture, illuminating this question.

What has been called the cultural aspect of transference has its origin in the social aspect of man. The very fact that transference is the transference of early childhood experiences with significant others makes this clear. The instinctual aspect of transference becomes clear when transference is seen as repetition compulsion; and when



it is explored in its energetic aspect. Yet, there is another aspect of transference, which takes all of that instinctual energy and drive into the service of the ego, as it can be said, or into the cultural realm. It does that not only as a product of sublimation of instinctual energy, but much more as a prerequisite of its expression. This is what is meant when Freud said the mother teaches the child to love.

The interaction between the child and his mother (or father) and other important adults in his early life create the unique human situation. From this synergetic interaction something new will originate, which was neither in the mother, nor in the child by itself. Yet this new entity is not altogether new; it was present not as an objectively tangible fact, but it was present in what is usually called culture, that is, the human interrelation.

This needed to be stated here in order to indicate the far reaching implications of Freud's new understanding that transference is a universal aspect of the human mind. [Klebel 1976, 110-111]

Freud developed the transference concept in his paper of the Dora Case<sup>2</sup> and his definition includes the following aspects:

Transferences are new editions of impulses or fantasies of the past, which are experienced as present and as related to the analyst.

According to psychoanalytic theory and practical experience in psychoanalysis, transferences cannot be avoided.

Transferences are not created by analysis; they are only brought to light by it.

In the beginning, transferences seemed to be a great obstacle to treatment, yet, if handled properly, they are the most effective vehicle of change in therapy and lead to the understanding of the neuroses and of the analytic process.” [Kleber 1976, 47]

The universality of transference in every human relationship, as stated by Freud is of importance in order to understand how transference and culture are related. Freud clearly and frequently stated this fact, for example in his *Autobiographical Study*:

It must not be supposed, however, that transference is created by analysis and does not occur apart from it. Transference is merely uncovered and isolated by analysis. It is a universal phenomenon of the human mind, it decides the success of all medical influence, and in fact dominates the whole of each person’s relations to this human environment. [Freud 1925, 20, 42]

Here it is clearly stated that transference not only happens in any human relationship, but that every relationship is dominated by transference, in other words, transference is essential to every relationship. On the other hand in Freud’s definition of culture, or civilization (Freud uses these terms interchangeable), two aspects are stressed, one that culture allows man to control the forces of nature, but most important in this context is the statement that culture regulates all relations of men to one another.

Human Civilization (or Culture) ... “includes on the one hand all the knowledge and capacity that men have acquired in order to control the forces of nature. ...

on the other hand, all the regulations necessary in order to adjust the relations of men to one another and especially the distribution of the available wealth.” [Freud 1927, 21, 5-6]

Freud defined culture as regulating all human relationships and defines transferences as dominating all human relationships but never mentions these two concepts together in his many papers on culture and in his papers on transference. This fact was one of the most important findings of this author's dissertation. The reasons for this are explored in the dissertation; it is mainly the fact that Freud sees culture from the instinctual side in an almost Darwinian perspective, even places the origin of culture into the guilt of the original human tribe over the original patricide he projects must have happened in the beginning. In his book "Moses and Monotheism" (1937) Freud describes this story and concluded that in a reaction formation this was the origin of monotheism.

After analyzing in the dissertation the Freudian transference concept and its relation to therapy, repetition compulsion, love and human relations in general, four theses on transference were presented in the author's dissertation, which will be quoted below:

If transference is a universal aspect of every human relation, it follows consequently that there is no stage in life without transference as long as there is relationship with other people.

Whatever occurs between two persons, as long as it can be called a human relation, will include transference as a basic function of this relationship.

Transference as a basic function of human relationships is not limited to two persons relating to each other; it is a characteristic of all human relationships including the relations between an individual and a group, and between groups themselves.

If culture is defined as that encompassing concept integrating all forms of human relationships, then the

transference concept will be of utmost importance for the understanding of culture. [Klebel, 1976, 150-151]

When this understanding of transference is related to culture a fourfold structure appears, which was originally described by this writer in the following way:

Transference is part of every relationship as stated by Freud. During this investigation it has become increasingly apparent that transference has to be seen as the transference of two aspects of every relationship. The two aspects have been described as the instinctual and cultural aspects of man. The function of transference is to connect these two aspects into a whole.

This connection can be described in two different areas which are interrelated; the first is the binding together of the instinctual and the cultural aspect in the individual. The other area is the tradition of this combination from one generation to the other. [Klebel 1976 191]

When the instinctual is understood as the biological and outside of man and the cultural as the inside or spirituality of man, then we can easily place transference into the Wilberian scheme of the four quadrants or can see transference as the idea that connects the four aspects of the tetrarchy together. Even when this author wrote his dissertation the importance of this finding was noted as essential to a new understanding of the human nature, when it was stated:

The understanding of the cultural function of transference is expected not only to be a contribution to psychoanalytic meta-psychology; it also opens up the psychological approach to the question of the nature of man. [Klebel 1976, 193]

After this introduction it needs to be demonstrated how this understanding of transference can be called tetrarchic and how this spreads a new light on both, on the concept of tetrarchies and of transference. Transference has two functions; it is bridging as a concept – and as a psychoanalytic experience – the area of the instinct with the area of personal relationships and it is further bridging one generation to the next, i.e., bridging the area of the collective and the individual, or, in other words, the area of the whole and its parts.

### **Transference as a Bridge between the Cultural and the Instinctual**

It needs to be noted that instincts are the interpretation of the biological desires and needs of humans, and the importance of transference is in the fact that transference enables the person to elevate or sublimate these instincts into the cultural or spiritual realm, so they can find satisfaction in the area of the cultural or spiritual. In the normal maturing process this is happening to every human being. In the analytic treatment of a person, who could not do this appropriately and suffers from neuroses, this process is renewed in treatment and hopefully brought to a mature solution. In other words, when the biological needs of the child are either not properly taken care of or are not elevated in the growing up process, to find their satisfaction in cultural and mature relations with others, mental illness appears and therapy or analysis is needed to learn what was missed before.

In this context maturity of the human self can be measured by the ability to sublimate the instinctual to the cultural, Freud would state “where Id was Ego shall be.” It could well be stated, that maturity is achieved when physical sexuality is replaced or better elevated by mutual love, so that the instinctual is more than the animalistic “nature” and is integrated and elevated into the spiritual, into love. Pure Sexuality becomes erotized through elevation in mutual love. The same is true for all other

instinctual need of the child. So intake of food becomes a festive celebration of a community and this process of sublimation can be carried forward into many rituals of different Religion, as for example the breaking of bread in the Christian Eucharist is a symbol for the presence of Christ in the community of believers.

The biological and physical constitution of a person might make this maturing process more difficult or impossible. The cultural factors of parenting and child rearing also influence this process. In most cases both of these causes are combined, so that the influence of nurture and nature can never be separated in the individual. We are dealing here with a polarity, a “Gegensatz,” between the instinctual and the cultural, between the physical and the spiritual, or between the body and the mind, which is connected and united through the process of transference, because already in the child parents transfer their cultural understanding to the newborn (or even the expected) child; the child then continues to transfer this experience later in life, in a mature or in a neurotic, or mentally ill fashion to all other relationships the child will develop during her life, especially to the relationship she will have with her children.

### **Transference as a bridge between the individual and collective**

The other aspect is the fact that transference bridges the internal dynamic from the individual towards the other, i.e., the other as individual or as a group, the other even as presented in different group structures such as family, state or other organizations like interest groupings or churches and finally all of humankind. This idea of culture, which is transferred from one generation to the next, is usually understood as including all social and spiritual ideas that determine humanity.

This aspect of transference – especially developed in the Object Relation Theory – was studied by Fairbairn, Winnicott and others in England.<sup>3</sup> In this theory, contrary to classical

psychoanalysis, where the emphasis is in the instinctual dynamic interaction, the need of the child to relate is the driving force of development. The fact that a child is born into a culture, into a family, and develops his 'self' in relation to the 'other', is underlying human development. One could say, the polarity between individual and collective is the dynamic force that causes the development of the child.

In this process the young child develops the reorientation of the other and of the self in his understanding of reality. This process is usually concluded when the child reaches the age of four and the understanding of myself as "I" and the other as "you" is the achievement of this early development. The fact that in this process the God Representation is also developed has been shown recently in a psychoanalytic study.

### Transference and the "God Representation"

As a matter of fact even the concept of God, as it develops in the child and matures in the adult falls into this developmental category, as has been described by Ana-Maria Rizzuto, M.D., in her book *The Birth of the Living God*,<sup>4</sup> where she follows the psychoanalytic thoughts of Freud and extends and surpasses his idea about the concept formation of God in the child and adult, coming basically to similar conclusions as this author. She wrote in the epilogue of her book:

In the end I had to disagree with Freud — but not totally: only with one Freud, the one of science, intellect, and reality, the Freud who said; "No, our science is no illusion, but an illusion it would be to suppose that what science cannot give us we can get elsewhere."

The Freud who believes that man lives on the bread of knowledge alone, I have to disagree with.

However, I follow the other Freud, the Freud of object relations, the Oedipus complex, family relations, until through my research I arrive at one of his own conclusions about some individuals in the Western World:

“The idea of a single great god – an idea which must be recognized as a completely justified memory, ... has a compulsive character: it *must* be believed.” [Freud 23, 130, italics in the original]<sup>5</sup>

In a final corollary to the dissertation of this writer a similar statement was made about transference and religion. Developed over many decades this idea is now coming to the conclusion that the transference concept is essentially connected to the tetrarchic understanding of man.



The transference concept as a bridge between the individual and collective aspect of man is the other side of the idea of this concept as bridging the instinctual with cultural, which has



been developed in the tetrarchic description of man. When we combine these two polarities, between the instinctual and cultural, between the individual and collective, we find ourselves on familiar ground and can simply translate these into the words of Ken Wilber, who talks about the inner and outer, the individual and collective structure of man and of the world in what he called the four quadrants as described before. The four causes of Aristotle fit into this schema as well and are included here in the picture.

Psychoanalysis has most intensively studied this relationship between people, between the "I" and the "Thou", between the "Self" and the "Other", and it was this relationship that has been investigated by the Heidegger<sup>6</sup> student and psychoanalyst Hans Loewald, who made the following conclusion:

Our object, being what it is, is the other in ourselves and our self in the other. To discover truth about the patient is always discovering it with him and for him as well as for ourselves and about ourselves. And it is discovering truth between each other, as the truth of human beings is revealed in their interrelatedness. While this may sound unfamiliar and perhaps too fanciful, it is only an elaboration, in nontechnical terms, of Freud's deepest thoughts about the transference neurosis and its significance in analysis.<sup>7</sup>

This relationship between the individual and the collective, between the self and the other was especially developed in the psychoanalytic Object Relations Theory, which theory is described by Otto Kernberg,<sup>8</sup>

Internalization of object relations refers to the concept that, in all interactions of the infant and child with the parental figures, what the infant internalizes is not an image or representation of the other ("the object"), but the relationship between the self and the other, in the

form of a self-image or self-representation interacting with an object-image or object-representation.

This internal structure replicates in the intrapsychic world of both real and fantasized relationships with significant others.

What needs to be stressed in this definition are two aspects of this theory. First, what the infant internalizes is a psychic, inner representation of the other and secondly that not the other as a person, such as a father or mother, is represented, but the relationship of the child to this person is what is represented. It is the relationship, something not tangible, something one could call spiritual, what is represented.

Consequently, in this relationship many other objects can be included, such as the safety blanket, or a Teddy bear, which is usually called a transitional object. Therefore, the child can after this development, replace a real relationship with this imaginary relationship. When the child at first relates to the security blanket, it uses this learned introject to substitute for the absent mother, and reduces anxiety that way. What below will be stated about the God representation needs to be understood in this special way.

In *Birth of the Living God*, Rizzuto describes in this context the God representation and demonstrates it on four cases from her psychoanalytic practice. She comes to the following conclusions

The first elaboration of a God representation which we can trace begins with eye contact between mother and child ... between the ages of two and three. [Rizzuto 178]

She clearly understands this relation in the frame of the Object Relations Theory when she says:

God is a special type of object representation created by the child in that psychic space where transitional objects

... are provided with their powerfully real illusory lives.  
[Rizzuto 177]

Rizzuto demonstrated in her paper that the idea of the God representation develops throughout the life of the patient. Usually it matures and is improved, but in the special cases she presented, she shows how the childish experience of the relationship with the parents still influences the adult understanding of God.

The psychic process of creating and finding God – this personalized representational transitional object – never ceases in the course of human life. [Rizzuto 179]

This original understanding of God is developed throughout life, especially in all life crises, and it must change to be able to support a mature believe in God.

God, as a transitional representation needs to be recreated in each ... crisis to be found relevant for lasting belief. [R. 208]

What Rizzuto demonstrates and documents based on her case material, is an important aspect of transference and its sublimation. From the internal representation of the self and the other, as postulated in the Object relation Theory, the representation of God is derived. That really means that when the child develops and understands him/herself in the polar opposite to the other – the adult – the child develops at the same time and in the same process the representation of God, of a Transcendent and Ultimate Reality. This reality is usually called God, but in an antireligious culture, or during its further development even in a religious culture, other ideas can be placed in this position. Such ideas are in a nationalistic milieu the Nation or the Race, in a communistic ideology it is the Proletariat. Leaders of totalitarian states are placed in the same position like the Führer, Stalin or the Chairman Mao, all of them were regarded as godlike persons and a godlike cult was

developed around them. In the same way, people who believe that science is the answer to all questions will place scientific progress into this position of absolute reality. All of these ideas or personalities can take on the mantel of a religion, which explains how these ideas can become attractive to people who believe these ideologies.

The need to find an ultimate entity which is developed in early childhood, when human relations are first established between the self and the other, appears to be universal. It will be transferred to all other future relationships, only its application is varied. This was stated by the physicist Walker.

Everyone worships reality. Each person looks about him, listens a moment – listens as long as life will let him pause to listen – and then he falls down and worships whatever it is that looks like this is what it is all about.

[p. 372]

Concluding it can be said: Transferences are the basis of all human relationships and are the spiritual aspect of every communication. Transference bridges the instinctual with the spiritual in the individual and further explains the tradition of this bridge of these polar opposite concepts of inwardness (spirituality) and outwardness (materiality) from one generation to the next and from one person to the other, as well as between groups and individuals and between groups as well.

In this process one more element is developed, the need to find an ultimate explanation, a transcendent idea or entity, or even a personal reality which is traditionally called God. On the other hand, individuals or even groups or cultures can utilize any other idea that is transcending the concrete reality, any other ideology to replace this representation, such as the transcendent idea of State, of Nation, of Masses, and often of Science replacing this original representation. In a more primitive culture any totem, animal, the sun or even imaginary entities that are connected to the natural processes, like ocean

and heaven etc. can be used as this ultimate representation, which would be called different gods in polytheistic cultures.

The psychological and sociological aspect of Religion can be studied from this point of view and would certainly be able to explain modern religiosity and irreligiosity from a new point of view. All what is stated in the Bahá'í Writings about the need to educate children describes the need to develop the original perception of God and assure that the child is helped to develop the original idea into a rational and informed idea of God and not develop other substitute ideas, which replace the true understanding and lead the growing up child in the wrong direction.

Monotheistic religions will concentrate this development onto their idea of the One God, but that does not exclude the possibility of alternatives replacing this idea as substitutes, which will be any other unifying idea of some highest reality, like State, or Nation, or Race, or the Masses, which has developed in modern societies. Even the regression of modern man into the old polytheistic religions is possible today in Neopaganism. The psychological and sociological aspect of Religion can be studied from this point of view and would certainly be able to explain modern religiosity from a new point of view.

This introduction of the Freudian transference concept into the philosophical and theological interpretation of the Bahá'í Writings is surprising and unexpected. Nevertheless, it seems to fit and it is even valuable and advantageous for the understanding of the Bahá'í Writings, shedding new light at the truth of the Revelation. What was found by Freud in his analysis of people in mental trouble, and what he made to the cornerstone of his therapeutic effort becomes through this correlation with the Bahá'í Scriptures a valuable contribution to both, to the understanding of the self of man and to the better understanding of the very Writings which were correlated with this Freudian concept.

This conclusion about the value of correlation as presented by Shoghi Effendi was described in McLean's book is the fact of the mutual benefit of correlation to both, to the understanding of the Bahá'í Writings on the one hand and the writings of philosophical and scientific thinkers on the other.

The method of correlation assumes that any truth statement found outside the Bahá'í corpus illuminates or augments truth statements found in the Bahá'í teachings, just as the Bahá'í sacred writings illuminate or augment the findings of other thinkers or systems of truth.<sup>9</sup>

There is another issue that needs to be mentioned here, even though a deeper study of this issue is still outstanding. It is the question of where in the psychic apparatus as described by Freud this transitional space is located. It is important to raise this question, especially if this is the space where the God representation in the human mind is located. Strictly following the Bahá'í Writings the answer is not difficult when considering these word of Bahá'u'lláh.

#### 59. O SON OF BEING!

*Thy heart is My home; sanctify it for My descent. Thy spirit is My place of revelation; cleanse it for My manifestation. [AHW 59]*

*But, O my brother, when a true seeker determineth to take the step of search in the path leading to the knowledge of the Ancient of Days, he must, before all else, cleanse and purify his heart, which is the seat of the revelation of the inner mysteries of God, from the obscuring dust of all acquired knowledge, and the allusions of the embodiments of satanic fancy. [KI 192]*

*Unlock, O people, the gates of the hearts of men with the keys of the remembrance of Him Who is the*

*Remembrance of God and the Source of wisdom amongst you. He hath chosen out of the whole world the hearts of His servants, and made them each a seat for the revelation of His glory. [GWB 296]*

It is the human heart that is the place of the God Representation, this starts in the little child and needs to be developed throughout life. That the heart is much more than a medical blood pump has been demonstrated by the fact that in heart transplants some basic, as well as, traumatic memories are transplanted and can appear in the dreams of the new owner of the heart. The new science of neurocardiology has proven additionally that the heart has what has been called “the little brain of the heart” as has been presented by this author in *Lights of Irfan* before where the following quote was presented.

In the last twenty years, evidence has accumulated for the presence of a functional heart brain – first described as the “little brain of the heart.” From a neuroscience perspective, the nervous system within the heart, that is intrinsic to the heart, is made up of populations of neurons capable of processing information independent of extra cardiac neurons.

This collection of neurons can sense alterations in the mechanical and chemical milieu of various regions throughout the heart. With every beat of the heart, changes in heart rate and regional dynamic changes are detected and transduced into neuronal impulses that are processed internally. Such information is also sent to neurons in the base of the brain via afferent axons in the vagus nerve and to the spinal column neurons via afferent axons in sympathetic nerves. This information is returned via efferent neurons controlling the heart. Furthermore, circulating hormones influence the behavior of the little brain of the heart.<sup>10</sup>

That the heart has abilities that are different but parallel to the abilities of the brain has been scientifically established.

Recent work in the relatively new field of Neurocardiology has firmly established that the heart is a sensory organ and a sophisticated information encoding and processing center. Its circuitry enables it to learn, remember, and make functional decisions independent of the cranial brain.<sup>11</sup>

From this evidence it can be concluded that what is revealed in the Bahá'í Writings about the heart can be correlated with findings of the science of neurocardiology, especially if we consider two facts. One is that the heart does not have consciousness, so what is going on in the heart is known only if it becomes conscious in the brain. Another thing is what we know from our dreams, there is a different language in the heart which has to be translated when what is in the heart gets to be known by the brain.

This means that the God representation or the personal knowledge about God is not an immediate fact of awareness, and it has to be translated into the brain if it needs to become known. Additionally, following again the Bahá'í Writings, the heart must be pure and kind in order that the Revelation of God is able to be recognized there.

*For the life of the flesh is common to both men and animals, whereas the life of the spirit is possessed only by the pure in heart who have quaffed from the ocean of faith and partaken of the fruit of certitude ... [KI 120]*

Therefore this is the first advice given in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh:

### 1. O SON OF SPIRIT!



*My first counsel is this: Possess a pure, kindly and radiant heart, that thine may be a sovereignty ancient, imperishable and everlasting. [AHW 1]*

Placing the transference of Freud and the transitional place of Winnicott into the heart opens up a new understanding of psychology and the remarkable feature is the fact that heart and brain work together, are united in many ways but have oppositional characteristics, which become obvious under different questions. Additionally in the heart is no awareness, so all what we know about it directly is communicated by the awareness of the brain, that functions like an interpreter translating the language of the heart into the language of the brain. These two languages are quite different. All the logical conditions, contradictions etc. which are part of the language of the brain cannot be expressed in the heart, as we know from our dreams, where the rule of contradiction does not apply, and contradictions can only be expressed in contradicting pictures placed next to each other.

Considering all of these ideas, which are at this point only speculative and are at best extensions and augmentation of known facts, much work has to be done until these ideas can be fully worked out. What can be said at this point without exaggeration is that the understanding of psychology is at its beginning and psychology is a scientific enterprise that has not reached full understanding today. Since these new understanding of the self and of the function of the heart were first expressed in the Bahá'í Writings, such a psychology could justifiably called a "Bahá'í Psychology."

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Wolfgang Klebel; *Transference and Culture, Towards a New Understanding of this Concept of Depth-Psychology*, Dissertation,

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Graduate School of Psychology, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena CA 1976. (Abbreviated: Klebel 1976 page)

<sup>2</sup> Freud, Sigmund, *The complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, Standard Edition, London, Hogarth Press, 1966-1974, 24 volumes.

<sup>3</sup> Confer Salman Akhtar, *Comprehensive Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, Karnac Books, Ltd. 118 Finschley Road, London, NW3 5HT, 2009 under Object Relation Theory:

The term, coined by William Ronald Fairbairn (1943,1944) refers to a set of psychoanalytic, developmental and structural hypotheses which place the child's need to relate to others at the center of human psychological motivation. This is in contrast to the 'classical' psychoanalytic theory, which conceptualizes human motivation in terms of instinctual tension and discharge. The main proponents of 'object relation theory' besides Fairbairn himself, include Michael Belint, Donald Winnicott, Harry Guntrip, Masud Khan, John Sutherland, Christopher Bollas and Patrick Casement. In North America, there is a tendency to include the views of Maline Klein, Elisabeth Jacobso, Margaret Maler and Otto Kernberg under the rubric of 'object relation theory' as well..

<sup>4</sup> Ana-Maria Rizzuto, M.D., *The Birth of the Living God*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1979,

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, page 212

<sup>6</sup> Loewald studied philosophy with Martin Heidegger, who enormously influenced him with his theory of language. To be fair it needs to be noted that Loewald was very upset, when Heidegger joined the Nazi party and being Jewish he left Germany.

<sup>7</sup> Loewald, H. W., *Psychoanalytic Study of Child*, 1970, 25, 45-68, "Psychoanalytic theory and the psychoanalytic process.", page 65

<sup>8</sup> *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* by Alain De Mijolla (Editor) Publisher: Macmillan Reference USA; 1 edition 2005.

<sup>9</sup> J.A. McLean, *A Celestial Burning: A Selective Study of the Writings of Shoghi Effendi*, Bahá'í Publishing Trust of India, F-3/6, Oklahoma Industrial Area, Phase-I, New Delhi- India. 110020 in the chapter "Expanding Correlation: Seventeen Principles" p. 302 – 304.

<sup>10</sup> J. Andrew Armour, MD., PhD., University of Montreal "Neurocardiology, Anatomical and Functional Principles". Published by the Institute of HeartMath, Boulder Creek, California 95006, page 5 and 2

<sup>11</sup> Rollin McCray, Ph.D. and Doc Childre, *The Appreciative Heart, The Psychophysiology of Positive Emotions and Optimal Functioning*, Published by the Institute of HeartMath, 14700 West Park Ave., Boulder Creek, California 95006, www.heartmath.org.

# Procrustes' Bed

## The Insufficiency of Secular Humanism

Ian Kluge

### Theme

The argument of this paper is that secular humanism's inability to accommodate the empirically established universal presence of religion in human nature undermines secular humanism's claim to be a viable world-view for mankind. This failure to live up to its self-proclaimed empiricism unleashes a cascade of consequences that undermines its internal coherence, diminishes its value as a rational argument and leaves the arguments for theism untouched.

### Part 1: Humanism and Secular Humanism

Perhaps the best and shortest definition of 'humanism' in general is offered by philosopher Corliss Lamont, whose *Philosophy of Humanism* states that humanism is "a philosophy of which man is the center and the sanction."<sup>1</sup> All branches of humanism are concerned with the dignity and worth of humanity as a whole and each individual. They all emphasize human existence in the natural world and in man as a 'natural' being; they place enormous value on the power of reason and critical analysis; and they all stress free will and the power of the individual to shape him or herself by their choices.

In general, there are two major types of humanism – theist and non-theist. Theist humanism holds that it is essential to

acknowledge the existence of a Transcendent ‘being’ that is absolutely independent from all knowable phenomena. The reason is that no description of human life is complete or accurate without reference to the Transcendent which may be a personal being or a non-personal process such as ‘independent origination’ in Buddhism, the Tao, Schopenhauer’s Will or Tillich’s ‘ground of being.’ Humanity is both physical and spiritual. In the contemporary West, theist humanism in its Christian form is best represented by Jacques Maritain’s “integral humanism.”<sup>2</sup> However, there are forms of theistic humanism which are not associated with any particular religion. Karl Jasper’s existential philosophy is among them. According to Jaspers, humans are always aware of something beyond themselves and beyond nature because of their contingency and their recognition that “man cannot be comprehended on the basis of himself.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, man’s existence cannot be explained and understood strictly on the basis of human existence. Jaspers calls this unknown which is both immanent and beyond us ‘Transcendence’ when he wants to emphasize its ontological ‘distance’ from us and as the “Encompassing”<sup>4</sup> to emphasize how it encloses us.

In this paper, our focus is ‘secular humanism’ or SH. Its starting point is the rejection of any form of transcendent i.e. supernatural being, in short, atheism. As Thomas Flynn states for secular humanists, “humanism begins with rejecting the transcendent as such.”<sup>5</sup> From the denial of the transcendent, it follows that the unaided human intellect, the ‘rational faculty’ as it is often called, is the most capable guide that we can follow throughout life.”<sup>6</sup> There is nothing else but reason to rely on – and the efforts to deceive ourselves about this situation only serve to hurt humankind and hinder its progress. Religion is basically a product of ignorance about the workings of the world and fear of death. Both of these can be overcome by following the methods of rational science and by adopting new attitudes towards human life.

SH exists in various forms but all share the absolute rejection of transcendence though the reasons for that rejection may differ. For example, Sartre's existentialist humanism<sup>7</sup> bases its rejection on ethical grounds. If there were a God, there could be no freedom and without freedom of choice there can be no ethics. Even if God existed, we humans must defy him in order to be free.<sup>8</sup> This principle is based on Sartre's belief that "existence precedes essence,"<sup>9</sup> i.e. that the individual makes or 'shapes' himself through his choices and that there is no human nature given to us ready-made by God. On the other hand, Marxist humanism – based on Marx's economic and philosophic manuscripts of 1844 – rejects God because God's existence alienates man from himself by estranging him from his positive attributes and above all, from his work. Another example of SH is "democratic humanism" which is based largely on the work of American philosopher John Dewey who combined his belief in religious evolution, the scientific method and his faith in American democracy to add a uniquely American flavor to humanist thought.

Although the term 'secular humanism' originated in the 1930's the roots of SH go back to ancient Greece. A number of the pre-Socratic philosophers such as Thales, Democritus, Protagoras and Heraclitus endeavored to explain the natural world in terms of natural causes and not as results of divine action. Thales, for example, tried to explain all natural phenomena as permutations of a single substance – water – and even outlined a basic theory of evolution. In short, these philosophers sought natural not supernatural explanations for the world around them. In more recent times, the growth of SH also received a strong intellectual impetus from Ludwig Feuerbach (d. 1872) who taught that the idea of God was a chimera, a projection of humanity's own attributes into a non-existent super-natural realm. In short, God is a magnification of humankind. Nietzsche re-enforced Feuerbach's teaching by proclaiming that God is dead.<sup>10</sup> Nietzsche also strengthened the naturalistic basis of SH by insisting that we must live and think

entirely within the limits of the natural world and that any reliance on the super-natural was nothing less than betrayal of ourselves.

In 1933, *The Humanist Manifesto I* listed ten major principles of SH. Among them are the foundational SH principles that

1. There is no God or any other supernatural being. The universe is “self-existing and not created.”<sup>11</sup>
2. Man is part of “organic nature” and the body/mind or body/spirit dualism must be rejected.
3. “Humanism asserts that the nature of the universe depicted by modern science makes unacceptable any supernatural or cosmic guarantees of human values.”<sup>12</sup>
4. “Religious Humanism considers the complete realization of human personality to be the end of man’s life and seeks its development and fulfillment in the here and now. This is the explanation of the humanist’s social passion.”<sup>13</sup>
5. There are “no uniquely religious emotions and attitudes of the kind hitherto associated with belief in the supernatural.”<sup>14</sup>
6. In the place of the old attitudes involved in worship and prayer the humanist finds his religious emotions expressed in a heightened sense of personal life and in a cooperative effort to promote social well-being.<sup>15</sup>

In 1949, philosopher Corliss Lamont re-iterated these points and clarified several features:

1. Humanism, having its ultimate faith in man, believes that human beings possess the power or potentiality of solving their own problems through reason and the application of the scientific method.

2. Notwithstanding arguments from science or religious doctrines of fatalism, human beings possess free will within certain physical limits.
3. Humanism believes in an ethics or morality that grounds all human values in this-earthly experience.
4. Humanism believes in the complete social implementation of reason and scientific method with “Full freedom of expression and civil liberties.”<sup>16</sup>

In 1973, well-known SH philosopher Paul Kurtz published *The Humanist Manifesto II*. This document strikes a more charitable chord than its predecessor insofar as Kurtz recognizes that religion has some positive aspects. However, he re-affirms the foundational principles of the first Humanist Manifesto and Lamont’s text by asserting that theism does “a disservice to the human species.”<sup>17</sup> He says,

In the best sense, religion may inspire dedication to the highest ethical ideals. The cultivation of moral devotion and creative imagination is an expression of genuine “spiritual” experience and aspiration. We believe, however, that traditional dogmatic or authoritarian religions that place revelation, God, ritual, or creed above human needs and experience do a disservice to the human species. Any account of nature should pass the tests of scientific evidence; in our judgment, the dogmas and myths of traditional religions do not do so.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, Kurtz rigorously emphasizes that ethics do not depend on religion or a belief in the Transcendent.

We affirm that moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is autonomous and situational needing no theological or ideological sanction. Ethics stems from human need and interest.<sup>19</sup>

In the last analysis, “Reason and intelligence are the most effective instruments that humankind possesses”<sup>20</sup> because these alone can serve our interests and needs.

In recent years, SH has been supported by the movement known as the New Atheism. However, it must be made clear that while all secular humanists are atheists not all new or old atheists are necessarily humanists. Marxists, for example, are not necessarily humanists even though they are atheists. The same may be said of Sartrean existentialists. The New Atheists have assisted SH by providing sharply worded critiques of belief in God and of ethics and social theory based on revelation as well as with arguments for the supremacy of reason and science in human decision making.

## Part 2: Procrustes’ Bed

Procrustes was an evil blacksmith and bandit in ancient Greece who gained a horrible reputation for a bed he invented. It was truly a ‘one size fits all’ affair. If you were too short, the bed functioned as a rack which stretched you until you fit the bed. If you were too tall, the bed worked as a chopping block and cut enough off your feet and legs to make you fit. The Greek hero Theseus ended Procrustes’ reign of terror by giving him a night in his own bed.

The central thesis of this essay is that SH is a Procrustes’ bed. On one hand, it amputates whatever aspects of human nature don’t fit its theory of man and on the other, it unreasonably stretches the use of certain terms and concepts to make up for the deficiencies caused by its amputations! Our conclusion is, therefore, simple: SH’s view of humanity is not true to its subject –humanity – and is, therefore, inadequate in its world-view, in its understanding of mankind and as a guide for the future.

Because SH is based on the rejection of all forms of belief in the supernatural and the Transcendent<sup>21</sup> it has insurmountable



difficulties in dealing with the global prevalence of religion both in the past and in the present. As one puzzled author states, “still, one wonders about the near-universality of the human experiences and feelings that are called “spiritual.”<sup>22</sup> The best that SH can say is that whatever may have been good in the past, religion is now a worthless and dangerous relic from history. The problem here is obvious. The SH view is totally in conflict with human nature as empirical scientific and historical studies have found it. SH overlooks the full significance of the empirical fact that religion is universal. We have never encountered either directly or through historical records any society that lacks religion or in which religion does not play a major part in a society’s world-view, social organization, ethics or law. This universality is irrefutable empirical evidence that religiosity is an intrinsic attribute of human nature and that as an intrinsic i.e. essential attribute, it cannot be removed whether by education or intellectual dismissal or amputation. Because it is an intrinsic part of human nature, religiosity returns even when it is suppressed. As we shall see below, like Freud’s famous “return of the repressed” or the famous cat who came back when they thought it was a ‘goner,’ humanity’s religious nature will always find ways to express itself. One of my philosophy professors used to say, “When you kick God out the front door, He comes in through the back window.”

More precisely, the universality of religion means that in one way or another, all peoples share the same fundamental ontology, i.e. theory of reality. In the most general terms, reality has at least two aspects, the phenomenal/material world and another, unseen reality whose presence is known by the existence of contingent beings. This identical foundation illustrates the Bahá’í teaching that “*So shall we see the truth in all religions, for truth is in all and truth is one!*” [PT 137] They start from the same ontological principle but, with the guidance of the Manifestations, they develop the consequences differently according to place, time and local conditions.

This universal foundation means that as far as humanity in general is concerned, nature is more than just material stuff. It is more than just what we can apprehend with our physical senses and we are more than just our physical bodies. ‘Behind,’ ‘beneath’ and/or ‘beyond’ phenomenal reality, there is a non-physical source or ‘ground of being’ that we perceive. As the Bahá Writings say, “*The signs of God shine as manifest as the sun amidst the work of His creatures.*” [GWB 143] How we experience this unknowable entity or process ‘beneath’ the physical and what it means varies from culture to culture over time, but the principle is essentially the same everywhere.

We should add that contrary to the SH view that belief in a super-natural ground of being is irrational, this belief is exceedingly rational and reflects the scientific method. It moves from empirical evidence i.e. the contingency of all known things and the need for all contingent things to have a cause and applies it to the phenomenal world. In other words, a universal empirical observation leads to a conclusion about phenomenal reality in general, namely, like all other things the phenomenal world needs a cause. Implicit in this conclusion is the understanding that whatever is the first cause or “Prime Mover” [PM 262] cannot be like all other phenomenal beings and, therefore, does need a cause need to be caused by anything else. That is why God is the “*Prime*” Mover. The question, “Who created God?” – often regarded by non-theists as a definitive retort – results from a failure to understand the difference between phenomenal or material reality and non-phenomenal and non-material. In short, the question exemplifies a logical category mistake.

Experientially, people intuit that there is more to reality than what meets the senses and this ‘more’ is endless. Existentialist philosopher Karl Jaspers refers to this ‘more’ of which people are aware as “the Encompassing”<sup>23</sup> which forms our horizon but always “indicates something further which again surrounds the given horizon.”<sup>24</sup> This endlessly expanding series of horizons – like boxes in a nested hierarchy – which begins with us in our

own personal concrete situations “announces the presence of being”<sup>25</sup> which is never directly encountered as a particular thing (like a butterfly or a horseshoe) but whose presence is always known through all things, situations and perspectives. It is like the mysterious self in Hume’s philosophy: we cannot identify ‘the self’ as a particular item in our stream of consciousness, but it is implicitly present in our consciousness of the stream itself.<sup>26</sup> Our natural and inescapable awareness of the Encompassing is what Jaspers means by the orientation to Transcendence, an orientation to something that is behind or beyond all natural phenomena. This orientation is the basis of all religion, i.e. the sense that there is something ‘beyond’ what appears to us is one of the things all religions and spiritualities have in common. It is the ontological basis of Bahá’u’lláh’s teaching of the essential one-ness of all religions because all other forms of religion and all specific teachings are ultimately based on this intuition of the Encompassing and the orientation to Transcendence. As Abdu’l-Bahá says,

*Bahá’u’lláh promulgated the fundamental oneness of religion. He taught that reality is one and not multiple, that it underlies all divine precepts and that the foundations of the religions are, therefore, the same. Certain forms and imitations have gradually arisen.* [PUP 175]

In other words, religion grows from the intuition of the reality beyond the phenomenal realm.

Humanity’s inherent orientation to Transcendence is so strong that even societies adopting a militant atheist worldview cannot escape it. Marxism provides a good example. Shoghi Effendi describes it as a “religious irreligion.”<sup>27</sup> The core of Marxist ontology is the concept of dialectical materialism which provides the ultimate justification for all other Marxist teachings. It is the foundation principle of Marxism and asserts that all phenomena including mind and thought are the products of the inter-actional or dialectical processes of

matter. This process is reality itself and the other process described in historical materialism i.e. the history of mankind and the economic and cultural superstructures are ‘add-ons.’ These add-ons include religion, social organization, government, law and art among other things.

It is not difficult to see that the process of dialectical materialism corresponds to Jaspers’ “Encompassing” and requires an orientation to Transcendence. The process is, in effect, super-natural. It has four characteristics not found in any other phenomena: (1) it is not limited in space, i.e. not particularized and is ubiquitous; (2) it is not limited by time the way all other phenomena are; (3) it is not dependent on the existence of any other particular thing for its own existence; and (4) it has logical priority over all phenomena, i.e. we cannot think of any phenomena without implicitly pre-supposing the existence of the dialectical process. Nothing else in nature exists in this unique way – which, in effect, means the dialectical materialist process is super-natural, i.e. beyond nature. It encompasses everything and, therefore, transcends everything. This shows how difficult it is to rid human thought of the Encompassing and the orientation to Transcendence – and this difficulty opens up the real possibility that this orientation is a response to something real. It does not, of course, prove that such a super-natural being i.e. God exists, but it does leave that possibility as a rational option.

Given the implicit metaphysical implications of dialectical materialism, it should be no surprise that after his 1920 visit to Lenin in the Soviet Union such an astute observer as Bertrand Russell said, “*Bolshevism is not merely a political doctrine; it is also a religion, with elaborate dogmas and inspired scriptures.*”<sup>28</sup> In *A History of Western Philosophy*, he lists structural similarities between the structure of Marxism and Christianity.<sup>29</sup>

Since all other Communist regimes have much the theoretical principles and structure, Russell’s remark about the religious

nature of Soviet Communism applies to them as well. Given Communism's implicit orientation to Transcendence, it is not surprising that even after seventy years of systematic atheist indoctrination a sudden resurgence of religion occurs in Russia and Eastern Europe. Furthermore, the persistent Chinese interest in religion despite decades of repression shows how deeply engrained this orientation is.

However, Marxism is not the only example of "religious irreligion" as we observe in the pervasiveness of Ersatz or substitute religion. They preserve the orientation to Transcendence and even a feeling of the Encompassing. We can observe this development in the incredible popularity of films, novels, TV series and comics that are based on the supernatural. Churches are emptying because more people find it easier to offer "willing suspension of disbelief"<sup>30</sup> to unconventional forms of the supernatural than to God. Given the popularity of entertainment about demonic possession and forces from hell it seems many people find it easier to believe in the devil than God. At the very least, they find it easier and/or more meaningful to 'play' imaginatively with devils, witches, werewolves, supermen with unearthly powers and magic than to play imaginatively with saints, miracles and appearances of the divine in the form of Manifestations. Perhaps the most obvious example of this is the incredible popularity of the Harry Potter books and films and all their imitators. In addition there are those books that move in a gothic direction and even somewhat satanic direction as seen in the *Twilight* series and its imitators as well as in the vampire series by Anne Rice. In the popularity of this literature of the supernatural we can still plainly discern the orientation to Transcendence at work, i.e. the sense or intuition that there is something else beyond, in or behind reality although in this *ersatz* form, the 'beyond' evokes fear rather than hope, inspiration and comfort. Moreover, the 'encompassing' aspect of the transcendent dimension exacerbates our fears. Negative as these entertainments might be, attraction to such phenomena is clearly an orientation to

Transcendence, i.e. to something beyond the natural world. This orientation has not been eradicated by the modern scientific-materialist mindset but has simply changed its form of expression.

The orientation to Transcendence is also evident in the large numbers who describe themselves as ‘spiritual’ as distinct from ‘religious’ in an institutional sense. Such orientations can run the gamut from a deep and profoundly moving appreciation of natural beauty to the pursuits of New Age wisdom vis-a-vis tarot cards, crystals, chanting and other spiritual practices. Among women in particular we observe the resurrection of Wicca which tends to seek the Transcendent below, in mysterious earth-powers, than in what they would call ‘sky-powers.’

Given the evidence presented above, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that the orientation to Transcendence – the basis of all religion – is far more widespread and far more difficult to escape than we think. What conclusions may we draw from all this? The universality of the orientation to Transcendence and the Encompassing clearly says that it is an essential attribute of humanity which cannot be eliminated – or amputated – without denying human nature as such. It is not an accidental attribute such as skin or hair color, education level or wealth which can be removed or changed without changing our fundamental identity as human beings. In other words, the secular humanist goal of removing or amputating the orientation to Transcendence seems highly unlikely to be realized.

The Bahá’í Writings refer to the orientation to Transcendence in two ways. We see such a reference in Abdu’l-Bahá’s statement that man has

*two natures; his spiritual or higher nature and his material or lower nature. In one he approaches God, in*

*the other he lives for the world alone. Signs of both these natures are to be found in men.* [PT 60]

Our “spiritual or higher nature” is oriented to God or Transcendence, i.e. oriented to ‘something’ beyond the phenomenal world. If this spiritual nature were lacking, we would be entirely enclosed within our material limits like animals which are “*utterly lacking spiritual susceptibilities, ignorant of divine religion and without knowledge of the Kingdom of God.*” [PUP 177] These “spiritual susceptibilities” are the second way in which we are oriented to Transcendence. He adds, “*In the human kingdom spiritual susceptibilities come into view, love exercises its superlative degree, and this is the cause of human life.*” [PUP 268] In other words, what distinguishes humanity from animals is that humans have “susceptibilities” i.e. a capacity for perceiving the spiritual aspects of reality and a corresponding orientation to Transcendence. These “susceptibilities” make us aware that there is more to reality than the physical appearances that we can perceive or that science can measure. However, this is not to say that in the Bahá’í view we ought to neglect our physical nature — only that it should be under the control of our spiritual selves. He reminds us that “*in the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh monasticism and asceticism are not sanctioned.*” [PUP 186] The challenge for man is to make sure “his spiritual being and intelligence man dominates and controls nature, the ruler of his physical being.” [PUP 81]

In light of the foregoing discussion, it is reasonable to conclude that SH simply does not present human beings as given by the empirical evidence both from the past and the present. By ignoring religion altogether, by diminishing its importance or by attacking it as outmoded, useless and/or dangerous, SH shows its inability to deal with humanity as we find it. Its understanding of humankind is correspondingly distorted and consequently its value as guidance for humanity is

limited. As we shall see below, some SH writers seem to be aware of this problem and explore ways of remedying it.

Once this problem is recognized, another one arises. If SH cannot deal with the empirically verified religiosity of mankind, what happens to SH's claim of being strictly guided by empirical science and reason? Obviously it cannot stand. And if that foundational claim is undermined, how strong is SH's commitment to other aspects of its program such as a rational and scientifically based ethics and morality? This logical self-contradiction seriously undermines its foundations and, by extension, the credibility of many of its claims as a superior world-view.

Indeed, these considerations revive an important ontological question that undermines the SH project: if the orientation to Transcendence and the Encompassing is universal, could it be that this orientation corresponds to something real – just as the eyes respond to the reality of light even though they cannot see light itself? Since this orientation has survived such momentous vicissitudes throughout its evolutionary existence, it must have served humanity's interests in surviving and thriving. But how can it serve our survival interests if it is completely delusional, utterly devoid of any relationship to something real, and confusing to human thought and understanding, if it needlessly drains our mental energies for nothing? While these questions cannot prove that God or the Transcendent exists, they are sufficient to put the issue of God's existence back on the table. Perhaps this is why Greg Epstein does not try to disprove the existence of God but argues that the concept of God is merely a "spandrel."<sup>31</sup> A spandrel is "a phenotypic characteristic that is a byproduct of the evolution of some other characteristic, rather than a direct product of adaptive selection"<sup>32</sup> This is implausible to say the least. A universal phenomenon that consumes an enormous amount of human physical and psychological energy and resources cannot rationally be dismissed as an inessential "by-product" of evolution. Such a Procrustean understanding of



religion illustrates the SH method of diminishing human nature to fit the SH world-view.

### Part 3: Why do Humans Need the Transcendent?

One of the key questions we must ask is how the orientation to Transcendence and the intuition of the Encompassing affects humanity. Does it make any difference if this orientation is lacking, or, conversely, what positive value does the orientation to Transcendence have in human lives? In this section we shall explore some of the ways in which our lives are shaped by this orientation and the awareness of the Encompassing.

In our view, the presence or absence of the orientation to Transcendence has a profound effect on our understanding of the nature of reality; on our self-understanding and self-evaluation as human beings; on the purpose and meanings of our lives; and on our ethics or legal systems. Whether this transcendent entity is recognized as the Tao, or a personal God, or a form of pantheism or panentheism or the process of independent arising makes no difference: the principle of transcendence remains an essential part of understanding the world and everything in it. No aspect of human existence is left unaffected. We can verify this for ourselves by studying the world-views of all cultures, their ethics and legal systems as well as their art, stories and poetry and social structures.

On the SH view, existence has one – material – dimension and there is absolutely no entity, will, process or authority to direct our affairs except our own, either individually or collectively. There is no other, super-natural will whose wishes we must take into account. However, on the religious view, existence is at least two dimensional – material and non-material or spiritual – and there exists some kind of entity, process or ground of being which has a will or nature or authority which we must take into consideration. Our affairs are not entirely in our own hands, starting with the human nature with which we have been endowed. Contrary to Sartre,

this does not mean that we are completely pre-determined since the choice to struggle against our human nature or work with it is a matter of free will. As Abdu'l-Bahá says,

*Some things are subject to the free will of man, such as justice, equity, tyranny and injustice, in other words, good and evil actions; it is evident and clear that these actions are, for the most part, left to the will of man.*  
[SAQ 248]

The SH view is a form of reductionism i.e. the viewpoint that everything about human beings can, in the last analysis, be reduced to physical and bio-chemical processes and that these physical processes completely describe human nature. If we reject the intuition of the Encompassing and the orientation to Transcendence, we shall be forced to understand ourselves completely as material beings subject to all the laws and limitations to which matter is subject. We have to understand ourselves as nothing more than bio-chemical processes. In our times, this requires us to accept a scientific understanding of the world and of ourselves – which leaves no room for the existence of a soul, of free will, life after death or even objective morals. In this one-dimensional life-world everything about us can – at least in principle – be explained in measurable material and physical terms. Even mind and thought are reduced to and fully explained by brain function. The contemporary term for this conflation of brain and mind is “identification theory.”<sup>33</sup> Consequently, we would agree with Pierre Cabanis that “The brain secretes thought like the liver secretes bile.”<sup>34</sup> The fact that we possess consciousness or, as Pascal points out, that we are a “thinking reed”<sup>35</sup> does not endow us with any special value if thoughts are mere physical secretions or bio-chemical reactions in the brain. On the SH view, we are clearly trapped in an ontological, one-level flatland from which there is no escape. This leads to a number of problems that highlight the insufficiency of SH in meeting the needs of humankind.

The problem is that human beings do not experience or understand themselves as mere physical processes – and resist doing so. That does not prove that humans are nothing but chemistry but it does show how SH is out of touch and insufficient to explain why humans instinctively cling to concepts like ‘self’ or ‘soul’ and find them necessary to function successfully. It is difficult to build a successful world-view as SH is trying to do when it denies (1) the universality of religion and (2) the way people universally experience themselves as more than material and as having free will. SH simply does not practice empiricism consistently. The following thought experiment demonstrates that we do not experience ourselves as purely material beings. If I had a super-computer that could tell you everything about your current condition, i.e. physical; emotion, intellectual etc. would you agree that the resulting print-out “is you”? If the super-computer added all the information about your past history and even family history, would the print-out “be you”? If we added all the emotions, fleeting thoughts, dreams, shameful secrets etc. would the resulting print-out “be you” or sum you up? In over thirty years of teaching I have never encountered a single person who would seriously accept a computer-print out of any size as being him or her. Here, too, we see – as Hume did – that the self cannot be reduced to or identified with all the data we can collect but remains stubbornly mysterious and irreducible. The self is more, and most, if not all, humans intuit this quite readily. Any philosophy – such as SH – which undermines or denies i.e. in effect amputates this understanding of ourselves as being more than empirical data is inevitably an insufficient view of human nature.

Another aspect of human nature that must be amputated in SH’s Procrustes’ Bed is the sense of the intrinsic value of humankind. On the basis of its own adherence to the scientific method and principles, SH cannot avoid the conclusion that as mere bio-chemical processes among all the others, humanity has no intrinsic value. Indeed, nothing and no one has because,

from a scientific perspective, matter itself does not have intrinsic value which can be objectively proven. If there is no such intrinsic value in human beings, then it follows that any claims about human value are external attributions – or if wish – rabbits pulled out of a hat. They are conventions which can be unmade as easily as made; they are not inherently necessary and essential. In the end, it is simply a matter of external circumstances and the accidents of history.

A consciousness informed by the knowledge that it has no intrinsic value and what whatever value it has is a mere social convention is substantially different than a consciousness informed of by a sense of intrinsic value based on a Transcendent entity, or by the will of God. The consciousness informed by knowledge of its connection to the Transcendent also has a sense of the ‘ontological rightness’ of its existence. Ontological rightness means that our intrinsic value is not merely an externally attached attribute from man-made conventions but is ontologically grounded in ‘something’ that is independent of time, space and matter and which “announces the presence of being”<sup>36</sup> in every particular thing. Each one of us is linked with the independent and eternal ground of being and that gives our existence an undeniable legitimacy and value. In religious terms, we are ‘necessary’ in a deep ontological sense because “*God loves all*”. [PUP 267] What God chooses to love cannot be worthless or existentially illegitimate. The Bahá’í Writings express this in the following statement from Bahá’u’lláh:

*Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth is a direct evidence of the revelation within it of the attributes and names of God, inasmuch as within every atom are enshrined the signs that bear eloquent testimony to the revelation of that Most Great Light.*  
[GWB 177]

The basis of our being and our ontological rightness and intrinsic value as creations of God could not be more clearly

established. Abdu'l-Bahá describes humanity as the “*consummation of this limitless universe with all its grandeur and glory hath been man himself.*” [TAF 13] There is no question of intrinsic value and ontological rightness here, not of dignity, and even cosmological importance:

*For the noblest part of the tree is the fruit, which is the reason of its existence. If the tree had no fruit, it would have no meaning. Therefore, it cannot be imagined that the worlds of existence, whether the stars or this earth, were once inhabited by the donkey, cow, mouse and cat, and that they were without man! This supposition is false and meaningless.* [SAQ 196]

Humanity's intrinsic value and ontological rightness could not be established more clearly. The ontological rightness of human kind is based on our necessary, our essential place and role in the order of creation. The tree exists to produce fruit and thereby the fruit justifies the existence and struggles of the tree. Abdu'l-Bahá's metaphor tells us that humans are “the reason of [the universe's] existence” as the culmination and highest expression of the powers inherent in the universe. That is why he states,

*Man is the microcosm; and the infinite universe, the macrocosm. The mysteries of the greater world, or macrocosm, are expressed or revealed in the lesser world, the microcosm.* [PUP 69]

However, there is another way in which consciousness informed by a sense of ontological rightness and intrinsic value differs from a consciousness informed by ideas about man-made conventions as the basis of its value. This concerns what psychologist Eric Erikson calls “basic trust” which is necessary for the complete and healthy development of any human being. In the individual, basic trust is primarily developed in relationship to the mother; to one degree or another, this trust – or lack of it – forms the basis of our relationship to the

world and our world-view which shapes our thoughts and actions. For example, our basic existential stance towards reality could be fearful, suspicious, trusting, appreciative or grateful or even mixtures of these. In our view this happens at the collective level as well. A world-view asserting that man is a by-product and chance-development of a fortuitous cosmic process without any purpose or meaning and likely to end in a universal 'heat death' or a 'big crunch' is unlikely to inform a sense of basic trust in the cosmos and in humanity and existence in general. Such a world-view is far more likely to generate a sense of cosmic mistrust or even despair which in turn undermines the sense of ontological rightness and mankind's intrinsic value, dignity and importance. These values may be asserted by man-made philosophies such as SH but in a universe in which everything exists as a result of chance and has no guiding purpose, such assertions inevitably sound hollow and cannot inspire enduring trust. They sound an awful lot like whistling in the dark.

Furthermore, there is nothing in the SH philosophy that actually addresses this vital issue of ontological confidence. In other words, SH cannot inspire the ontological confidence in ourselves or in our species that is at least possible in world-views that possess an orientation to Transcendence and an intuition of the Encompassing. The inner conceptual resources are simply not there to do so; there is no basis from which to develop such basic trust and ontological confidence. This cannot help but undermine our view of humanity itself. Why should one bio-chemical process be intrinsically superior to any other? Does it matter more if a person or a tree dies? It is not difficult to see how materialist answers to such questions could lead to the de-valuing of mankind and denial of its intrinsic value or cosmic purpose. Of course, SH does not overtly hold such a minimalist or even depressing view of humankind – nor does it intend to. Indeed, quite the opposite: it strives to develop a positive outlook on humanity. The problem is that it undermines its own optimism because its conceptual

framework – especially its uncritical view of science – brings these questions to the fore and fails to answer them adequately, i.e. logically on the basis of its own conceptual framework.

Let us examine more closely why SH's conceptual framework undermines its overtly stated optimism. If human beings have no intrinsic value, then the very foundations of all ethical systems has been removed. After all, the whole point of establishing rules by which to treat people in certain ways is that humans have some intrinsic value that must be respected and preserved. If we try to find our values by turning to nature or the scientific method, a serious difficulty, known as Hume's Guillotine, arises. Hume's Guillotine points out that we cannot logically get from a fact or a description of a fact to a prescription for what we are obligated to do. There is no bridge from 'is' – a description of what is the case – to 'ought' – a prescription to what ought to be or should be the case. For example, just because it is the case that Jane cooks supper every night does not mean she *ought* to cook supper or is obligated to cook supper every night. The plain fact of her cooking does not contain a moral obligation to cook in the future. The reason for this is simple: facts alone just are. To confuse a description of a fact with a prescription to do a certain act is to commit a logical error known as a category mistake which means that we are mixing up completely different kinds of things as we do, for example, when we compare apples to horse shoes. Facts do not contain any intrinsic obligations. The problem of Hume's Guillotine seriously undermines SH's claim that empirical knowledge alone is sufficient for ethics to guide man. From that perspective, SH is completely insufficient.

In contrast, the Bahá'í world-view inspires trust in the cosmic processes because values are intrinsic in all things as creations of God.

*This composition and arrangement [the universe],  
through the wisdom of God and His preexistent might,  
were produced from one natural organization, which*

*was composed and combined with the greatest strength, conformable to wisdom, and according to a universal law. From this it is evident that it is the creation of God, and is not a fortuitous composition and arrangement. [SAQ 181 emphasis added]*

In short, creation has order and purpose. This belief strengthens the orientation to Transcendence and the intuition of the Encompassing which in turn inspires us to develop our individual and collective “spiritual susceptibilities.” To one degree or another (depending on their place in the order of progressive revelation) all religions develop these susceptibilities which in turn informs a consciousness that is positive in its outlook and confident in action. In short, it provides a positive existential stance to the world. Those inspired by Bahá’u’lláh – or by other Manifestations – share this positive existential stance and consciousness and

*shall labour ceaselessly, by day and by night, shall heed neither trials nor woe, shall suffer no respite in their efforts, shall seek no repose, shall disregard all ease and comfort, and, detached and unsullied, shall consecrate every fleeting moment of their lives to the diffusion of the divine fragrance and the exaltation of God’s holy Word. Their faces will radiate heavenly gladness, and their hearts be filled with joy. Their souls will be inspired, and their foundation stand secure. [SWAB 251]*

Furthermore, the Bahá’í Writings and theist ethics in general do not suffer from the ‘is/ought’ problem. Since God is the Creator of nature, all natural facts are already implicitly endowed with value, meaning and potential ethical significance.

*Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth is a direct evidence of the revelation within it of the attributes and names of God, inasmuch as within every atom are enshrined the signs that bear eloquent*



*testimony to the revelation of that Most Great Light.*

[GWB 177]

In other words, there is more to all created things than can be known by strictly empiricist analysis. We have already seen this with the unsuccessful attempts to reduce ‘self’ or ‘soul’ to purely objective knowledge. From a Bahá’í perspective, all things have spiritual aspects that are known only to those who have experienced “*the awakening of spiritual susceptibilities.*” [PUP 339] Everything reflects spiritual values and consequently, there is no logical category mistake of jumping from fact to value in basing an ethical argument on natural facts. The facts already embody ethical categories as seen in the names and attributes of God. For example, the virtue of generosity is embodied in every created thing insofar as it ultimately exists by the generosity of God Who brought it out of nothingness. [GWB 61] Generosity is moral primarily because it is in harmony with God’s will. The various advantages it brings to individuals and collectives are also valuable, but by themselves they do not establish the moral goodness of the act. Only being in harmony with God’s will can do that. As Bahá’u’lláh says,

*The source of all good is trust in God, submission unto His command, and contentment with His holy will and pleasure ... The source of all evil is for man to turn away from his Lord and set his heart on things ungodly.* [TB 153-155]

In other words, no action or goal can be good if it does not harmonize with or “submit” to God’s commands; conversely, any action or goal that contradicts God’s command is evil.

Unlike SH ethics, Bahá’í ethics have within themselves the conceptual resources to bridge the gap between ‘is’ and ‘ought.’ The presence of God’s names and attributes performs this function. Consequently, Bahá’í and theist ethics have not only self-sufficiency but also coherence, i.e. there is no necessary conceptual gap between empirical facts and valuations. Indeed,

the Manifestation of God bridge this gap even more directly and clearly insofar as they are the Beings that guide our understanding of the facts to the correct moral conclusions. This feature is also missing in SH ethics.

It is important to state that we do not wish to impugn the moral sincerity of secular humanists on the issues of ethics and the valuation of mankind. They are as sincere as anyone else on both counts – but that is not the problem. The serious deficiency of their high views of humankind is that it has no basis whatever in SH's empirical, scientific world-view. These high views are, in effect, rabbits pulled out of a hat, add-ons unrelated and unrelatable to the scientific method: from a strictly scientific view, secular humanists are not entitled to these high ethical views. They cannot be established by science and they obviously come from somewhere else, perhaps secular humanists' emotions or perhaps from the religiously shaped cultural atmosphere in which most of them grew up and live. However, what matters from our perspective is simply the observation that SH is absolutely insufficient in establishing its valuation of man and its ethics on a strictly rational and scientific basis.

This is no small matter. It may be argued that even with a concept of the intrinsic values of humans, religions have not always treated people decently. This is unquestionably true but there is still an important difference between SH and the religious world-view. Because of its ontology, religion has internal self-corrective resources available when it goes awry i.e. it can still refer back to its ontology and the resulting philosophy of man and correct course. Whether or not it always does so is a different issue. However, what is clear is that SH has no such inner self-corrective resources due to the limitations of its materialist ontology and strict adherence to the scientific method. All that SH can do is replace one set of conventions with another set of conventions; moreover, it makes our value an extrinsic issue and weakens us because we are completely dependent on others. In an age that has

witnessed the ravages of totalitarian regimes SH does not seem to have a sufficient ontological foundation for the intrinsic value of human beings. It seems clear that the SH materialist ontology which makes intrinsic value impossible will have a difficult task ahead if it aims to instilling the deepest possible confidence and appreciation in the ontological rightness of our existence as human beings. Yet this is exactly what it must do if it wishes to present an effective program to replace religion in the life of mankind.

#### Part 4: Procrustes' Bed as a Rack

For the unfortunate overnight guest at Procrustes' motel who was too short for his bed, Procrustes added a racking mechanism that would let him stretch the guest until he fit the bed perfectly. Precisely because they amputated the transcendent aspects of human existence, secular humanists find themselves forced to make use of its stretching functions in order to make up for the lack of deep significance or *gravitas* in man-made concepts. A concept based on human thought and social approval simply cannot attract the esteem and reverence inherent in concepts based on the Transcendent. The reason is obvious: it is hard, if not impossible, to feel that ideas produced by a creature that is the chance result of an absolutely random, purposeless and meaningless universe have the same *gravitas* as ideas from or inspired by or connected to the eternal ground of being. To overcome this gaping difference, to make its ideas adequate or fitting to human needs, SH tries to stretch its concepts to make them appear as adequate to the needs of human nature.

The vital importance of this ontological grounding – or lack of it – is recognized by the foremost spokesman for SH in North America, Paul Kurtz, who writes,

the central issue about moral and ethical principles  
*concerns their ontological foundation.* If they are

neither derived from God nor anchored in some transcendent ground, are they ephemeral?<sup>37</sup>

The Bahá'í Writings answer Kurtz's question about ephemerality in the affirmative. Because they are not grounded in the Transcendence or in the teachings of the Manifestation, purely secular philosophies have no endurance. Abdu'l-Bahá states

*The philosophers who claimed to be the educators of mankind were at most only able to train themselves. If they educated others, it was within a restricted circle; they failed to bestow general education and development. This has been conferred upon humanity by the power of the Holy Spirit.* [PUP 205; cf. PUP 400]

Kurtz recognizes that without a basis in a “transcendent ground” ethical systems, the viability of SH ethics – and with it the whole SH program – is questionable and in that sense, not sufficient for human needs. The reason is that all ethical systems are implicitly or explicitly based on an ontology, i.e. a theory of reality which allows us to justify their teachings as objectively real because they are based the nature of reality itself. However, SH's ontology rejects any version of transcendence as a basis of its world-view and consequently must rely exclusively on reason and science. This creates two problems. First, as we have already seen, because of Hume's Guillotine empirical facts alone cannot lead to moral demands; a description cannot logically be used as a prescription without making a logical category mistake. Furthermore, science cannot be a basis of values because values are not proper objects of scientific research. Things that are appropriate subjects of scientific research must meet the following criteria: (1) are physical/material; (2) are susceptible to empirical direct or indirect observation by the humans senses or instruments; (3) are measurable or quantifiable; (4) are results of repeatable experiments or observations; (5) are observer independent and

(6) are disprovable or falsifiable by observation and/or experiment. These criteria, which are the basis of the scientific method, show that ‘values,’ ‘moral judgments,’ ethical beliefs cannot be determined by science. Science may provide information which we might consider in making ethical decisions but the actual ethical aspect of judgment must come from beyond the facts themselves, either human reasoning or divine revelation or some combination of the two. This situation is easy to illustrate with a simple question: how could a scientific experiment prove that stealing, adultery and murder are morally wrong? Science can point out the damage this does, but then, what experiment could prove that doing such damage morally wrong? What if I don’t care about the damage as long as I get my way or get pleasure? In the end we will be left with a stack of psychological, sociological and economic facts, none of which can tell why me I shouldn’t be ‘bad.’

Kurtz’s starting point for SH morals is what he calls the “common moral decencies”<sup>38</sup> which he claims are accepted by all cultures. Among them are truthfulness; promise-keeping; trustworthiness; sincerity; honesty; justice; tolerance and cooperation; good will; sexual consent and fairness. These, he believes are inherent in human nature and in our situation as social beings. In his view, without these “common moral decencies” any society is unworkable and will disintegrate. Consequently, he feels they are acceptable everywhere.

The first serious problem is that Kurtz, like all utilitarians, fails to distinguish between the useful and the moral. Useful behaviors are not necessarily morally good. The useful and the good are different logical categories and for that reason cannot be conflated, as Kurtz, and, indeed, all utilitarians do. For example, take the hospital room scenario. In a hospital, five dying people could be saved by a transplant of a different organ. A lightly injured young man arrives and the chief surgeon decides to give the dying five patients his young, healthy organs. By doing so he achieves a utilitarian goal – saves five lives – and achieves the utilitarian maxim of “the

greatest good for the greatest number.” However, while one can argue for the sheer practicality of the surgeon’s solution, it is not possible to argue his actions are moral. The judgment that an act is morally good and not merely useful cannot come from the empirical facts themselves – as we have seen with Hume’s Guillotine.

Hume’s Guillotine and the scientific method make it clear that no matter how useful an action may be, the promotion from being useful to being morally good cannot be based on mere empirical evidence. The same is true for the promotion of values – such as being thoughtful, educated or polite – to being moral values or obligations. To be promoted from being useful or valuable, we need something more, something not merely empirical and, thereby, subject to Hume’s Guillotine. There are only two remaining choices from which derive that ‘something extra’. One is social convention and the other is our orientation to Transcendence and the Encompassing. Humanity has used both, usually turning to the Transcendent to decide what is or is not moral and using social convention to enforce those decisions.

In theory at least, Kurtz recognizes the potential importance of the Transcendent when he asks, “If they [our moral principles] are neither derived from God nor anchored in some transcendent ground, are they ephemeral?”<sup>39</sup> The flip side of his question is, ‘Can morals based strictly based on empiricism endure?’ The Bahá’í Writings suggest the answer to Kurtz’s question is negative. Abdu’l-Bahá states

*Surely that which is founded through the divine power of the Holy Spirit is permanent in its potency and lasting in its effect.*

*Material brotherhood does not prevent nor remove warfare; it does not dispel differences among mankind. But spiritual alliance destroys the very foundation of war, effaces differences entirely, promulgates the*

*oneness of humanity, revivifies mankind, causes hearts to turn to the Kingdom of God.* [PUP 130, emphasis added]

In the first part of this quotation, Abdu'l-Bahá indicates that spiritual and not material power will have “lasting effect,” i.e. they will not be “ephemeral.” Then he provides specific examples of what he means by contrasting “material brotherhood” with “spiritual” brotherhood to the advantage of the latter. The “spiritual brotherhood” is “lasting in its effects” precisely because it is connect to or grounded in something higher than mankind and its shifting advantages, interests and vicissitudes.

Kurtz even points us to the answer to his question about the ephemerality of values and morals not connected to the Transcendence. He states that “the central issue about moral and ethical principles *concerns their ontological foundation.*”<sup>40</sup> In other words, while he realizes the importance of the “ontological foundation” of ethics, he rejects the notion of Transcendence as the necessary foundation. He is ware that the nature and structure of reality itself determines whether an action is ethical. For example, if we believe that all of us were born because we needed sharp punishment in our lives, then making life easier for us would not be good – but hurting us would be. The problem for SH is that its strict empiricist and materialist ontology logically prevents it from making any value judgments at all because of Hume’s Guillotine and the limits of the scientific method. That being the case, the “common moral decencies” Kurtz advocates can only be grounded in human agreement and cannot have the same in-depth foundation as ethics rooted in something that is eternal or timeless, that is not limited by time and space, that is independent of all phenomenal things and that is the ground or producer of all phenomena. In short, his advocacy of these “common moral decencies” lack *gravitas*.

In his attempt to make the “common moral decencies” into the basis of SH ethics in particular and the SH program in

general, Kurtz stretches or exaggerates their viability and sturdiness to give them a *gravitas* that cannot be justified in terms of the SH empiricism and naturalism. This problem in internal coherence undermines the ability to justify its conclusions rationally and, thereby, to justify its *gravitas*. The ‘*gravitas*’ of any world-view or ethical system refers to how seriously we must take it on the basis of its (1) internal logical coherence, (2) its ability to connect to human beings as we know they are and have been in the past; (3) its ability to engage people’s “ultimate questions”<sup>41</sup> at the emotional, intellectual level and spiritual levels; and its (4) the issues of legitimacy, authority and universality. In the foregoing discussions, we have already seen that SH is weak vis-à-vis internal logical coherence and we shall see more evidence to this effect below. We have also seen that in its inability to accommodate humanity’s universal orientation to Transcendence, SH fails to deal with humans as we find them now and in the past, thereby undermining its claims to empiricism as well as its usefulness as a world-view and guide. This failure also reveals SH’s shortcomings vis-à-vis the ultimate questions that all cultures answer regarding the nature and make-up of reality and the nature and purpose of humanity. The orientation to Transcendence and the intuition of the Encompassing are essential aspects of the answers to “ultimate question.” It is impossible for a philosophy that rejects or neglects the answers to these ultimate questions to claim the *gravitas* to be an effective guide for most of mankind. Its concepts cannot reach that far.

The next insufficiency of SH in regards to *gravitas* concerns the foundational question of legitimacy which deals with three questions: (1) Who or what – if anything – has the universal knowledge, and the understanding of humanity to legitimize or warrant laying down moral principles and precepts for the human race? (2) Who or what – if anything – has the knowledge, understanding and goodness necessary to legitimize a demand for obedience? (3) Who – or what – is inherently entitled to make obedience a condition for attaining ‘rightness,’



or true value and appropriate worth as a human being?’ These questions must be answered in a satisfactory manner for claims to legitimately to win acceptance in society.

It is self-evident that humans lack such inherent legitimacy. Not only are human individuals fallible but they also lack the unlimited knowledge and insight needed to achieve full understanding of any situation and therefore, cannot dispense perfect justice and compassion among the complexities of existence. Humans are often fickle; consciously or unconsciously pursuing personal advantage; they lack absolute independence from all things, i.e. are susceptible to outside influence, interference and coercion. Humans cannot guarantee objectivity and “equity.” [GWB 203] These facts about human nature lead to an almost self-evident question: Given the frailties of human nature, how can any human pronouncements attain the legitimacy needed to win acceptance as moral standards? The problem with SH is that it has no answer to this fundamental question – at least no answer the vast majority of people are willing to accept. Therefore, instead of abandoning the orientation to Transcendence they have experienced for themselves, people chose to build their world-views on ethics on this orientation and their intuition of the Encompassing. Being good ‘spiritual empiricists’ they built on their actual experience rather than on other people’s theorizing. We may not agree with this choice, but it is not as irrational as SH often makes it out to be.

Indeed, the choice is logically straight forward once we have accepted our orientation to the Transcendent and intuition of the Encompassing. God or any transcendental being is not only unaffected by the aforementioned human deficiencies, but He is also the actual maker of the world and the nature of everything in it. Given His knowledge, it is difficult to imagine who else could have genuine ethical legitimacy since His guidance is the only reliable guide to ‘the good.’ This choice has fewer rational impediments than the SH alternative and so, from that perspective, is eminently rational.

The second aspect of *gravitas* is the question of power. Without legitimacy, power is tyranny but without power, legitimacy is impotent. Thus, to see how legitimacy is actually put into practice we must ask (1) ‘Who – if anyone – has the power necessary to truly enable people to follow these rules despite their short-comings and weaknesses?’ (2) ‘Who – if anyone – has the power to impose His will and His ethical judgments on humankind?’ (3) ‘Who – if anyone – can impose both obligations or laws and consequences for committed or omitted acts?’ It is important to understand precisely what these questions mean. There is no doubt that various human powers – for example, societies, priests, ideologies, leaders of thought – will try to answer these questions for themselves and that some of them will have a degree of worldly success. However, as we have already seen from Abdu’l-Bahá, this will not be “*lasting in its effect.*” [PUP 130] The Transcendent alone has this power in an ultimately real sense, and though it does not manifest its powers in ways we can easily understand, in the end, the Transcendent will prevail. This underlying confidence and certainty is one of the reasons religions are associated with all cultures and ethical systems.

The third aspect of *gravitas* is ‘universality.’ Here, the most fundamental question is, ‘Is there such a thing as a universal human nature?’ Answering this will tell us whether the limits of authority are defined by time, culture, economics or political ideology. Both the Bahá’í Writings and SH answer this question affirmatively insofar as both believe that a universal ethical standard follows from a universal human nature. Such a universal human nature is presupposed in Kurtz’s “common moral decencies.” The significant difference between the Bahá’í Writings and SH is that the Writings believe that humans need the inspiration and guidance of the Manifestation to actualize our moral potentials.

Because postmodern philosophy has made the concept of a universal human nature so controversial in the last thirty years,

it is important to show how the Writings unequivocally support this principle. For example, Abdu'l-Bahá says,

*When we observe the human world, we find various collective expressions of unity therein. For instance, man is distinguished from the animal by his degree, or kingdom. This comprehensive distinction includes all the posterity of Adam and constitutes one great household or human family, which may be considered the fundamental or physical unity of mankind. [PUP 190, emphasis added]*

God has created human nature as it is, and the teaching of the oneness of humankind affirms that this nature is universal even though different cultures may actualize different aspects at different times. The teaching of the oneness of humankind starts with the “physical unity of mankind.” Furthermore, all humans possess a “*human spirit which distinguishes man from the animal [this] is the rational soul, and these two names – the human spirit and the rational soul – designate one thing.*” [SAQ 208] Regardless of culture, time, place or circumstance, all people share one human nature because they have a rational soul. We also share a higher, spiritual nature and a lower animal nature which the higher nature must control. [SAQ 118] In addition, we all possess “*spiritual susceptibilities*” [PUP 339] which must be cultivated in order to make spiritual progress possible. Since there is a universal human nature, then it logically follows that a universal ethic is possible, i.e. at least some ethical rules apply to everyone at all times and in all places. Since God is the creator of human nature, no one is better qualified than God to establish what this ethic is. Consequently, there are ethical standards valid across all cultures, places, times and circumstances and that cross-cultural moral judgments are possible. Shoghi Effendi writes,

He [Bahá'u'lláh ] insists on the unqualified recognition of the unity of their purpose, *restates the eternal*

*verities* they enshrine, coordinates their functions, *distinguishes the essential and the authentic from the nonessential and spurious* in their teachings, separates the God-given truths from the priest-prompted superstitions, and on this as a basis proclaims the possibility, and even prophecies the inevitability, of their *unification*, and the *consummation* of their highest hopes. [PDC 107, emphasis added]

The core of this statement is that Bahá'u'lláh “restate[d] the eternal verities” which means (1) that certain truths – including ethical truths – are not bound to one time and (2) that these “verities” which Bahá'u'lláh “restated” are the same as those taught by previous Manifestations in other times and places. Some of these resemble Kurtz’s “common moral decencies” though this concept as presented by Kurtz lacks the sanction of the Manifestations. His arguments fail to ‘stretch’ them or provide sufficient *gravitas*. In effect, Shoghi Effendi confirms a meta-ethical perennialism for those morals that are not “priest-prompted superstitions” and “nonessential and spurious.” His dismissive description of those religious teachings that deviate from the “eternal verities” clearly delegitimizes them. The underlying assumption is that the “eternal verities” are suited to a universal human nature and what is best therein. This suggests an important conclusion: ethical relativism does not apply to the “eternal verities” or “fundamental verities”<sup>42</sup> but it applies to the superstructural cultural adaptations. The former are universal and the latter are particular.

It is also important to ask, ‘Can a man-made ethical system claim to be universally valid for all human beings?’ On the basis of the foregoing arguments, the answer is clearly negative: man-made ethical systems lack *gravitas* in the form of legitimacy; *gravitas* in the form of power, and *gravitas* in the form of universality.

The latter is inescapably deficient in this regard is because humans only have access to incomplete knowledge conditioned by time, location and circumstances, and, therefore, cannot, even in principle, have the insight into human nature to make their knowledge universal. This limitation is recognized by all systems of meta-ethics and is the source of much debate and controversy. Various types of meta-ethical skepticism and nihilism find their basis here.<sup>43</sup> The fact that this deficiency still causes so much debate suggests that emphatic denials to the contrary, theistic meta-ethics cannot just be ignored.

#### Part 4.1: “Religion for Atheists”

Alain de Botton’s book *Religion for Atheists* is an attempt to stretch the SH world-view to help it fulfill important personal and social functions that SH amputated by rejecting religion. Unlike the militant New Atheists like Dawkins, Harris and Hitchens, de Botton recognizes that religions have fulfilled very useful and worthwhile functions for humanity in the past. He says that atheists can admit that

We invented religions to serve two central needs which continue to this day and which secular society has not been able to solve with any particular skill: first, the need to live together in communities in harmony ... And second, the need to cope with terrifying degrees of pain ... to trouble relationships, to the death of loved ones and to our decay and demise ... *God may be dead ... the urgent issues which impelled us to invent him up still stir and demand resolutions which do not go away when we have been nudged to perceive some scientific inaccuracies in the take of the seven loaves and fishes.*<sup>44</sup>

To his credit, de Botton understands that religion was not just irrational and fearful foolishness but an evolutionary development answering deep human needs that are still with us. Unfortunately, he fails to understand that an orientation to Transcendence and the Encompassing are an intrinsic i.e.

essential part of the answers to our human needs. Thus, he, too, applies the amputating function of Procrustes' Bed – which, in turn, requires to make use of its stretching mechanism when what remains is found to be inadequate for human needs. Having recognized the positive function of religion, he concludes,

*The error of modern atheism has been to overlook how many aspects of the faiths remain relevant even after their central tenets have been dismissed. Once we cease to feel that we must either prostrate ourselves before them or denigrate them, we are free to discover religions as repositories of a myriad ingenious concepts with which we can try to assuage a few of the most persistent and unattended ills of secular life.*<sup>45</sup>

While we applaud de Botton's open-mindedness, his secular humanist suggestions for meeting humanity's 'spiritual' needs are no more than "ersatz" or feeble substitutes for the religious originals he rejects. He wants the comforts and advantages of the spiritual life without the 'metaphysical' or 'super-natural' baggage. In the last analysis, what he suggests is a form of psychologism, i.e. a reduction of the spiritual and religious states which includes recognition of Transcendence, to psychological states. These mental states are purely subjective and have no cognitive value beyond ourselves, i.e. they tell us nothing about the world or transcendent realities. Whatever value and meaning they have is assigned to them by us. In short, their value is entirely arbitrary.

However, 'genuine' spirituality, i.e. spirituality as universally understood as involving some reference to the supernatural is excluded from de Botton's SH world-view. His SH outlook denies it is one thing to experience community with my neighbors because I choose to value and appreciate them, and, quite another to value and appreciate them because they each exhibit the signs of God and are each an image of God. As Abdu'l-Bahá says, "*All the creatures are evident signs of God,*

*like the earthly beings upon all of which the rays of the sun shine.*" [SAQ 113] Appreciating one's neighbor in the Bahá'í (or religious) world-view has an ontological dimension that connects the appreciation to God or to the Transcendent source of all being and, thereby, provides what we have called "ontological rightness" as well as gravitas. The SH version is simply a personal, psychological response that has no value beyond itself and certainly no transcendent guarantor. Yet the universality of religion indicates that such a connection to the Transcendent is precisely what human beings need and desire.

Let us examine one of de Botton's examples. He points out that churches are good places where strangers can meet comfortably because all are recognized as children of God and committed to serving Him and even spreading His faith. De Botton's answer to such a 'safe space' is the "Agape Restaurant"<sup>46</sup> where we are required to sit and eat with strangers and, thereby, break the barriers between us instead of merely reinforcing old connections. While the Agape Restaurant is certainly a novel idea worth trying, it cannot replace the spiritual connectedness rooted in the orientation to Transcendence. Being a good dining partner cannot replace or be an "ersatz" for being a child of God. Dinner in the Agape Restaurant may arouse pleasant feelings and be very informative, but the experience of deep spiritual kinship through God is more than a good feeling but also a statement about the ontological value of the other. In fact, it is difficult not to find such a suggestion somewhat feeble insofar as it does not comprehend what spiritually-based brotherhood is about. By-passing some of de Botton's more outlandish ideas for ersatz institutions and rituals, let us examine his reflections on the Virgin Mary. Devotion to her, he says, is valuable because it allows us to "be weak in her presence,"<sup>47</sup> to give free reign to our most tender emotions, to recognize and embrace our vulnerability. This is good for us because "atheists may neglect the frailty that is an inevitable feature of all our lives."<sup>48</sup> They need to cultivate their tender emotions. De Botton's solution

to the callousness that might result from the atheist world view are “Temples to Tenderness”<sup>49</sup> These would use art – the great sad Madonnas of Catholicism – as places to reconnect with these softer aspects of ourselves, to learn about ourselves from the perspective of helplessness, vulnerability, suffering and tenderness. Once again, the problem is clear: an SH philosopher is trying to stretch secular concepts to meet human needs by eliminating their religious foundations. In the medieval Madonnas, the Virgin Mary isn’t only another sad woman; her sadness represents the sadness of God for the waywardness of man because that, after all, is why God needed to incarnate Himself through Her. Otherwise we could just reduce it all to Bob Marley’s “No Woman No Cry” but that cannot give us the transcendental comfort and solace we seek. It simply doesn’t stretch that far. Once again, the vital ontological dimension needed by humanity is missing.

There is no need to multiply examples to show how secular replacements for useful religious customs are destined to failure given humanity’s long demonstrated need for a connection to the Encompassing. Like a baby blanket on an adult bed, secular concepts cannot be stretched to cover the transcendental needs which have demonstrably been a part of human nature for at least 300,000 years.<sup>50</sup> In the last analysis, de Botton’s ersatz or substitute institutions and/or practices are simply not the same kind of things as the religious institutions and rituals they are designed to replace. As Christ says,

*Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?* [Matthew 7:9-10]

Although offered with the best intentions, de Botton’s substitutes for transcendently based spirituality seems destined to fail.

In *Good Without God*, Greg Epstein also explores the strategy of establishing SH parallel institutions and practices to



replace their religious counterparts. Even his title at Harvard University illustrates this: Humanist Chaplain. This title summarizes his claim to show that the pastoral services traditionally provided by chaplains or rabbis can be provided equally well by secular humanists for whom “God is beside the point.”<sup>51</sup> He goes on to state, “The point of Humanism is not whether or not a God exists, but whether we ought to worship, fear or pray to it.”<sup>52</sup> In this position, reminiscent of Sartre, Epstein hopes to side-step the existence of God debate and show how SH teachings can replace divine guidance, i.e. ethics rooted in the Transcendent. Doing this will, as we shall see, force him to stretch some of his concepts to the point of untenability. There is no way to side-step the issue of God’s existence.

The stretching problem in SH is illustrated in Epstein’s chart comparing the Biblical Ten Commandments to their SH counterparts. In *Exodus* 20:3 the first commandment states,

*I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*<sup>53</sup>

There are three points to be noted here. The first is that we have the immediate presence of the Transcendent as the source of the command. This provides the ontological dimension and connection that humans have always sought and required as the basis of legitimacy, authority and universality in moral matters. Second, the implicit choice between God and other gods has an ontological dimension that takes this choice out of the strictly personal domain. Another will is involved and that complicates matters. Third, this choice has greater meaning than other, strictly personal choices because it connects us to the Transcendent. In short, the First Commandment displays *gravitas*.

Epstein’s SH version reads as follows:

*Seek the best in yourself and in others, and believe in your own ability to make a positive difference in the world.*<sup>54</sup>

While the humanist statement is unquestionably excellent advice and we have no desire to disparage its content, none of the attributes noted in the Biblical First Commandment are present and this makes it inadequate for human needs. The entire transcendent dimension is absent and that is exactly what is necessary to satisfy the intrinsic human orientation to Transcendence. Consequently, the choice to obey or not to obey this ‘commandment’ is a strictly personal matter and nothing more; it lacks the “ontological rightness” that comes with a command from God, the creator or ground of being of the universe. In short, it is a psychological matter and nothing more. Moreover, the difference between the commandment and Epstein’s SH humanist version is the difference between a command from a legitimate (as defined above) and universal authority, i.e. God and a suggestion or a genteel urging from a fellow human being. This urging is not wrong – it is simply not enough, i.e. not adequate to replace a divine command. It lacks the legitimacy that humans have historically sought in Transcendence while the SH version is clearly no more than good or even excellent advice.

Let us briefly look at another example from Epstein’s book. He quotes the Third Commandment, “*Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.*”<sup>55</sup> He replaces this with “Be positive and constructive rather than negative and disrespectful.”<sup>56</sup> Clearly, each of these two statements inhabits different ‘worlds’ and while each provides good counsel, they cannot be considered as even approximate equivalents. Not only does the Third Commandment refer to the Transcendent – and implicitly to all the associated ontology – but it also invokes two concepts that have no place in the SH world-view: guilt and punishment. Taking God’s name in vain is not like

offending another human being, i.e. another created being – it is offense against the Creator of all beings and is, therefore, far more serious because of the ontological implications. It is not merely a personal attack but rather an attack on the basis of all being. For that reason it elicits sharp divine punishment. None of these concepts are involved in Epstein's SH version which completely omits the issues of punishment and guilt. These have no place in the SH world-view except as social and legal concepts and have no ontological implications at all.

It is significant that Epstein admits the failure of humanism in his book. He states,

Many factors have contributed to Humanism's failure, thus far, to fulfill expectations.<sup>57</sup>

He explores various reasons why this is the case, but he does not recognize the problem with transcendence because to do so would be to destroy the very foundations of SH. In our view, the failure to understand and adequately deal with humanity's intrinsic orientation to Transcendence and intuition of the Encompassing is fatally damaging. This orientation and intuition has to be taken into account in any world-view and philosophy of man. All attempts to explain them away whether they come from Feuerbach, Nietzsche, Marx or Dawkins are doomed to failure precisely because they do not genuinely reflect human nature and its orientation to Transcendence.

## 5. Conclusion: "Humanism's Failure"<sup>58</sup>

Although SH is an intellectual failure in regards to internal logical coherence, Hume's Guillotine, the scientific method and the achievement of *gravitas*, it presents a positive challenge to 'people of faith' to examine their own scriptures and struggle to present their teachings without falling into the same errors. It should also warn us not to 'water the wine' of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings to the point where in effect, they become a pale imitation of themselves for the sake of 'acceptance' and start

to be more like SH. It is sometimes tempting to do this but in the end, nothing is gained by doing so.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Corliss Lamont, *The Philosophy of Humanism*, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Integral Humanism*.

<sup>3</sup> Karl Jaspers, *On My Philosophy*, in Walter Kaufmann, ed. *Existentialism from Dostoevski to Sartre*, p. 152.

<sup>4</sup> Karl Jaspers, *Reason and Existenz*, p. 52.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas W Flynn, “Why Is Religious Humanism?,” *Free Inquiry*, 1006.

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- <sup>6</sup> Matthew S. D'Agostino, "Reason and Rationality: The Core Doctrines of Secular Humanism," *Free Inquiry*, Winter, 1944.
- <sup>7</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, 1946.  
<https://marxists.org/reference/archive/sartre/works/exist/sartre.htm>
- <sup>8</sup> I call this 'Byronic humanism' after the poet Lord Byron who told his friend Shelley that "I am born for opposition." He couldn't help opposing anything that might be more powerful than he was. Marlon Brando as Johnny Strabler in *The Wild One* portrays Byronic humanism in modern America.
- <sup>9</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 30. Also, *Essays in Existentialism*, p. 78.
- <sup>10</sup> Frederick Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. by Thomas Common, Sections 108, 125, 343.
- <sup>11</sup> *The Humanist Manifest I*,  
[http://americanhumanist.org/Humanism/Humanist\\_Manifesto\\_I](http://americanhumanist.org/Humanism/Humanist_Manifesto_I)
- <sup>12</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>13</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>14</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>15</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>16</sup> All quotes in list (1) through (6) from Corliss Lamont, *The Philosophy of Humanism*, p. 12 – 14.
- <sup>17</sup> Paul Kurtz, *The Humanist Manifesto II*,  
[http://americanhumanist.org/Humanism/Humanist\\_Manifesto\\_II](http://americanhumanist.org/Humanism/Humanist_Manifesto_II)
- <sup>18</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>19</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>20</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>21</sup> Thomas W. Flynn, "Why is Religious Humanism?" in *Free Inquiry*, Fall 1996.
- <sup>22</sup> Malcolm D Wise, "Religion and Spirituality: A Humanist View," *Free Inquiry*, Summer 2002.
- <sup>23</sup> Karl Jaspers, *Reason and Existenz*, trans. by William Earle, p. 51.
- <sup>24</sup> Karl Jaspers, *Reason and Existenz*, trans. by William Earle, p. 52.
- <sup>25</sup> James Collins, *The Existentialists*, p. 110.
- <sup>26</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*, Book II, Section 11.
- <sup>27</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 181.
- <sup>28</sup> Bertrand Russell, the Preface to *The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism*, emphasis added. <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/17350>
- <sup>29</sup> Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*, BK II, Chapter IV, Section II, p. 364.
- <sup>30</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, Chapter XIV.
- <sup>31</sup> Greg M. Epstein, *Good Without God*, p. 26.

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- <sup>32</sup> Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spandrel\\_%28biology%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spandrel_%28biology%29)
- <sup>33</sup> JJC Smart, “*The Mind/Brain Identity Theory*,” in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mind-identity/>
- <sup>34</sup> Pierre Cabanis, <http://metaphors.iath.virginia.edu/metaphors/17922>
- <sup>35</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, #347.
- <sup>36</sup> James Collins, *The Existentialists*, p. 110.
- <sup>37</sup> Paul Kurtz, *Forbidden Fruit: The Ethics of Secularism*, p. 95; emphasis added.
- <sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, p. 93.
- <sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, p. 95; emphasis added.
- <sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, p. 95; emphasis added.
- <sup>41</sup> James Leonard Park, Asking Ultimate Questions. <http://www.tc.umn.edu/~parkx032/CY-ULT-Q.html>
- <sup>42</sup> Message from the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá’is of the world Ridvan 1966. (Compilations, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 594) The purpose of referring to the “fundamental verities” in Compilations is to provide readers with another listing of these “verities.”
- <sup>43</sup> Gilbert Harman, *The Nature of Morality*, p. 11.
- <sup>44</sup> Alain de Botton *Religion for Atheists*, p. 12; emphasis added.
- <sup>45</sup> Alain de Botton *Religion for Atheists*, p. 13; emphasis added.
- <sup>46</sup> Alain de Botton *Religion for Atheists*, p. 43.
- <sup>47</sup> Alain de Botton *Religion for Atheists*, p. 171.
- <sup>48</sup> Alain de Botton *Religion for Atheists*, p. 173.
- <sup>49</sup> Alain de Botton *Religion for Atheists*, p. 176.
- <sup>50</sup> Archaic Human Culture, [http://anthro.palomar.edu/homo2/mod\\_homo\\_3.htm](http://anthro.palomar.edu/homo2/mod_homo_3.htm)
- <sup>51</sup> Greg M Epstein, *Good Without God*, p. 14.
- <sup>52</sup> Greg M Epstein, *Good Without God*, p. 43.
- <sup>53</sup> Exodus 20:3 (King James) in Greg M Epstein, *Good Without God*, p. 118.
- <sup>54</sup> Greg M Epstein, *Good Without God*, p. 118.
- <sup>55</sup> Exodus 20:7 (King James), in Epstein, *Good Without God*, p. 119.
- <sup>56</sup> Greg M Epstein, *Good Without God*, p. 119.
- <sup>57</sup> Greg M Epstein, *Good Without God*, p. 173.
- <sup>58</sup> Greg M Epstein, *Good Without God*, p. 173.

# Women and Wisdom in Scripture

Baharieh Rouhani Ma'ani

Gender equality was a far off dream before mid-nineteenth century. People around the world, though separated in the past by natural barriers and diverse in culture, race, language, belief and creed, agreed on one thing: the way they regarded and treated women as subordinates to men. The wellbeing of the male half of humanity had occupied center place even in scripture and adherence to tradition made unthinkable any challenge to what appeared the 'norm'. Women lived under the thumb of men's authority. To justify the subjection of women, men resorted to 'vain imaginings' and 'idle fancies',<sup>1</sup> quoting scripture in support of their superiority. The belief that gender inequality was sanctioned by religion and men's superiority had the support of scripture led to untold inequities perpetrated against one half of humanity.

The inability to recognize the essential principle of the oneness of humanity, coupled with proclivity to promote fantasy, caused falsehood to appear as reality and concealed the truth of gender equality under layers of ambiguity. The uneducated masses, for their understanding of the letter and spirit of religious teachings, depended almost exclusively on the privileged few, who in the past reserved for themselves the right to education and the authority to interpret scripture. The use of biased language, a conventional medium for conveying spiritual and social laws, enabled men to hold on to their presumed superiority over women. The glimmers of hope that gender equality would at last become a tangible reality penetrated human conscience on a massive scale when the Báb

made His mission known in 1844, followed by Bahá'u'lláh's declaration of His mission in 1863. The creative forces generated by the rapid succession of the twin Manifestations of God one hundred and seventy years ago, created a fresh impulse in the world and produced reverberations everywhere, particularly in lands where freedom has been enjoyed as a right.

In this paper the treatment of women in religion, the direct and indirect influence of the Babi and Bahá'í Faiths in raising awareness about women's plight and transforming attitudes towards them across the globe, the role of linguistic biases in degrading women's status, the role of wisdom in preparing the ground for gender equality, and finally the need for vigilance to prevent past shortcomings from infiltrating our way of thinking and behaving will be discussed.

Religion has been intricately linked to the degradation of women's status since time immemorial. In many parts of the world it is still the case. Any voice raised in favor of the restoration of women's fundamental rights is silenced by opponents, who invariably quote from scripture in defense of their distorted views about women. To achieve the goal of subjugating women, religious leaders realized that the key to their success was keeping women ignorant. For that reason attempts to free women from the bondage of ignorance through education is even today fiercely rejected in countries where religious fanaticism reigns. Those who go against traditional practices and seek an education are regarded as threat and their perceived acts of transgression are punishable by death. Evidences of this skewed belief are still manifest among fanatical and radical adherents of certain religious sects in places like Afghanistan, Pakistan and parts of Africa. They oppose the establishment of schools for girls and threaten the lives of young women who seek education to advance their situation in countries where religious fanaticism has been gaining support.



Bahá'u'lláh warns the *“Oppressors on Earth”* to withdraw their hands from tyranny and has *“pledged not to forgive any man’s injustice. This is My covenant.”* He says, *“which I have irrevocably decreed in the preserved tablet and sealed it with My seal of glory.”* [HW P64] He admonishes His followers: *“The friends of God must be adorned with the ornament of justice, equity, kindness and love. As they do not allow themselves to be the object of cruelty and transgression, in like manner they should not allow such tyranny to visit the handmaidens of God.”*<sup>2</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has acknowledged the injustices perpetrated on the basis of gender: *“Divine justice demands that the rights of both sexes should be equally respected since neither is superior to the other in the eyes of Heaven.”* [PT 161]

Tyranny, injustice, oppression and inflicting harm on vulnerable human beings have ever existed in the world. The most glaring of all, however, has been the kind affecting more than one half of the human race. This kind of tyranny has been committed not only by primitive men against women, but also by the civilized; not only by the ignorant, but also by the erudite; not only by the ungodly, but also by the people of faith. The question is why? This kind of tyranny prevented women for eons from fulfilling their preordained measure. This kind of inequity has been by far the most insidious committed in the world. It has been the widest in scope and the longest in duration.

It is insidious because it has been ongoing forever and affected women at the family level, which is the most basic unit of society, to organizations at the highest level and everything in between. It has been the longest in duration because no one knows when it began and it is yet to end worldwide. The victims have endured maltreatment for countless generations not only in the hand of their enemies but also the ones near and dear to them, including the men they bore and reared. This is indeed the saddest human drama played on the world stage for countless centuries. How did it happen and why did it take so long to address the injustices? Why was humanity so oblivious

of women's plight and why it took so long to introduce remedies, to right the wrong? Speculations about how it happened are many and determining its genesis is most difficult, but why it took so long is not difficult to ascertain. Since the topic is women and wisdom in scripture, the focus will be limited to the recordings of holy books, though women have been oppressed within and outside the confines of religion, which indicates that however it started, religion did not remain immune from its effects.

### Treatment of Women in Religion

One of the areas of human life governed by religious law is that of "relations among individuals and between individual and society."<sup>3</sup> To accomplish the object of effecting "*a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions*", [KI 240] religion takes into consideration the requirements of time, the capacity of the people it directs and their potential for progress within a specific timeframe. This human element has made it necessary for religion to use 'wisdom' in achieving the aim of spiritualizing human beings and guiding them to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. To achieve this, judging by the recordings of holy books, divine revelations in the past seem to have focused attention and effort mostly on the male segment of humanity and concerned themselves primarily with their interest. "*In former ages*", 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, "*men enjoyed ascendancy over women because bodily might reigned supreme and the spirit was subject to its dominion.*"<sup>4</sup> Constrained by the requirements of time, which regarded physical strength and forceful nature the criteria of superiority, a narrative granting men authority to rule over women and requiring women to be subservient to them was developed, promoted, widely accepted and perpetuated for many thousands of years. This narrative stayed current until mid-nineteenth century when the Báb made His

Mission known, followed by Bahá'u'lláh's revelation. Their Advents revolutionized the affairs of humankind, accelerated the process of its coming of age and drastically changed the fortunes of womankind.

Women are endowed by Providence with attributes necessary to bear and rear future generations. As nurturers and protectors of life, they give of themselves to help fetuses grow into perfect human beings. They sacrifice their own interest that vulnerable infants may survive and flourish. As first educators of humankind they have amazing capacity for tenderheartedness, patience, forbearance, self-abnegation and love in its purest form. These qualities are inherent in men as well but it takes more effort and inducement to bring them to the fore. The focus of scripture in the past on the edification of men, therefore, may have been a requirement of wisdom. The perceived preferential treatment of men was however exploited to the full by those who reserved for themselves the right to interpret scripture. They put women down at every opportunity, pushed them into oblivion, deprived them of their human rights, in short enslaved them. To hold on to what they perceived to be their prerogative, when the founder of a subsequent religion introduced improvement in the status of women, they objected vehemently and did everything in their power, including misinterpretation of scripture and imposition of arbitrary restrictions until women lost the ground they had gained and their status became even worse than what it was previously.

References in the scriptures of the past to the nobility of human soul and spiritual goodness of all did not establish gender equality, neither succeeded in averting the sufferings inflicted on women, because they were overshadowed by references pointing to their status being inferior to men. In fact no specific and categorical evidence is found in religions predating the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh's revelations advocating the equality of the rights of women and men. The presence of

references to the inferior status of women in scripture gave way to the maltreatment of women in religion.

An examination of scriptures of the three religions we are most familiar with shed light on this phenomenon. The first chapter of the book of Genesis<sup>5</sup> confirms that both men and women were created in the image and likeness of God, enjoyed equal status and were given similar functions to perform: “*And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness ... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it...*” [Genesis 1:26-28]

The structure of the passage is intriguing. The same thing could have been said in a simpler fashion. Its complexity lent it to misinterpretation and led to inequality of men and women. We turn to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá for clarification of the term ‘man’ in the above passage: “*The biblical statement ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness’ does not mean that woman was not created. The image and likeness of God apply to her as well.*” [PUP 74] He then explains: “*In Persian and Arabic there are two distinct words translated into English as man: one meaning man and woman collectively, the other distinguishing man as male from woman the female. The first word and its pronoun are generic, collective; the other is restricted to the male. This is the same in Hebrew.*” He adds: “*To accept and observe a distinction which God has not intended in creation is ignorance and superstition...*” [PUP 74] In this statement ‘Abdu’l-Bahá confirms the causes of gender inequality being ignorance and superstition. These words are synonyms of ‘vain imaginings’ and ‘idle fancies’, which Bahá’u’lláh has used to highlight the causes of inequality.

Men and women might have initially enjoyed the equality that the first chapter of the book of Genesis confirms. If that was ever the case, it is not known how long it lasted, for no

record of it exists. The process of men gaining ascendancy over women seems to have been gradual. The pretext for the change is recorded in the second and third chapters of the book of Genesis. To justify women's subjugation, an imaginative and elaborate scenario was contrived. In brief, the story claims that Adam was first formed and Eve was created from his rib. Eve was deceived by a serpent and ate of the fruit of the forbidden tree, of which Adam ate as well, fully aware that he was disobeying the instructions of God. When he was called to account for his transgression, he blamed Eve, his wife. As a result, she was made to suffer the severest punishment: "*Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.*" [Genesis 3:16] Thus was sealed the fate of women for millennia and tyranny against them reigned unchecked.

About the contrived story of creation 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

*If we take this story in its apparent meaning, according to the interpretation of the masses, it is indeed extraordinary. The intelligence cannot accept it, affirm it, or imagine it; for such arrangements, such details, such speeches and reproaches are far from being those of an intelligent man, how much less of the Divinity ... Therefore, this story of Adam and Eve who ate from the tree, and their expulsion from Paradise, must be thought of simply as a symbol. [SAQ 123]*

Sadly the story was taken literally and led to an era of tyranny and injustice engulfing one half of humanity. Even today girls are prevented from going to school in some parts of the world, young women seeking an education are shot in the head,<sup>6</sup> and it is all done in the name of religion! A story so extraordinary in detail that according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá "*intelligence cannot accept it, affirm it, or imagine it*", found currency among people who consider themselves intelligent and

has been used to impose arbitrary restrictions on one half of the human race.

The Books of Moses, probably the oldest religious documents in existence, contain many inconsistencies. The account of the creation of the first pair of human beings is a major inconsistency and its effect on the cause of womanhood has been devastating. It is not known how exactly the inconsistency occurred. Each of the existing schools probably taught its own version, which did not agree in every detail, before they were consolidated into one. To achieve consensus, the consolidators seem to have retained the inconsistencies they could not resolve; the major issue being the status of women which by then had suffered irretrievable setback. The appearance of the two contradictory stories about the creation of Adam and Eve in close proximity in the initial chapters of Genesis “either laid the foundation for degrading women’s status in religion or gave religious support to discriminatory views already in circulation. It is noteworthy that the distorted creation story was widely accepted and, together with the story of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, was used by theologians and priests in a way that had an adverse effect on the popular view of women’s inherent nature.”<sup>7</sup>

The Manifestations of God who came after Moses introduced measures to improve the status of women. However, before the Advents of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh, none went as far as declaring gender equality, no doubt as a consideration of wisdom, for gender inequality was so entrenched that the pronouncement of equality would have shocked those that most needed religion and would have kept men outside the sphere of religious influence. Evidence shows that whatever improvement was made by subsequent Divine Educators, was lost almost immediately after He passed away.

Jesus Christ, during His ministry, accepted women into His presence and treated them kindly. No indication can be found in the statements He made that He ever put women down or

degraded them in any way. On the contrary, He elevated them at every opportunity. Women did well early in Christianity. Mary Magdalene, titled by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the Pride of Men arose with astonishing firmness and steadfastness after Christ’s crucifixion. Through genuine love for the teachings of Jesus she provided such inspired guidance that became the cause of steadfastness and enthusiasm of His disciples.<sup>8</sup> Walking in her footsteps the early Christian women did well until St. Paul in his letters introduced restrictions to check their advancement. The justification for the restrictions was the ‘extraordinary’ story of the creation of Adam and Eve, as recorded in the second and third chapters of the book of Genesis:

*Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety. [1 Tim. 2:11-15]*

The tone and contents of St. Paul’s letters provide a window into how early Christian men viewed the activities of the women believers. The letters also disclose the women’s success, especially in giving talks and teaching Christianity, which caused alarm and disturbed some men who, instead of being inspired by the women’s example, complained and expressed concern. The situation must have been serious or St. Paul, who advocated a break with the past, would not have upheld the sanctions that had kept women backward. Sentences such as “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection” and “I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence” reveal how strongly rooted was the prejudice against women. Another letter from St. Paul, which justifies the requirement for women to cover their heads,

confirms his conviction that only man, the male, was created in the image and glory of God, and that woman was of the man:

*... a man indeed ought not to cover his head, for as much as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither is the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man. [1 Cor. 11:7-9]*

By sanctioning old restrictions on women, St. Paul revived the contrived story of creation and deprived women, so soon after Christ's crucifixion, of their God-given rights. The question then is: Why was appeasing the men so important and why women had to continue to pay the price of appeasement? Did wisdom have anything to do with it? Humanity had not yet come of age and had to be treated according to its capacity. Physical force was the criterion for superiority and men were physically strong. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says: "*In former ages, men enjoyed ascendancy over women because bodily might reigned supreme and the spirit was subject to its dominion.*"<sup>9</sup> No wonder then that the answer to men's immaturity was pacifying their aggressive nature in order to spiritualize them under the canopy of religion. Fortitude has been the mark of women's strength. Their long suffering has helped the process of realizing the goal of spiritualizing mankind. Now that the era of justice has dawned presaging humanity's coming of age, the restoration of their rights is at hand.

Prophet Muhammad introduced a number of measures to upgrade the status of women, which had steadily eroded for countless centuries before His revelation. However He, too, revealed laws commensurate with requirements of the time and limitations of the people among whom He appeared. For example, He reaffirms that man was first created and out of him was created his wife: "*O men, fear your Lord, who hath created you out of one man, and out of him created his wife, and from the two hath multiplied many men and women.*" In



the same passage He admonishes His followers to “*fear God by whom ye beseech one another; and respect women, who have borne you, for God is watching over you.*”<sup>10</sup> In fact He came very close to advocating gender equality when He said: “*The women ought also to behave towards their husbands in like manner as their husbands should behave towards them according to what is just.*” Regrettably He added: “*... but the men ought to have a superiority over them...*”<sup>11</sup> Another verse of the Quran says: “*Men shall have the preeminence above women, because of those advantages wherein God hath caused the one of them to excel the other, and for that which they expend of their substance in maintaining their wives.*”<sup>12</sup> Here again we see how popular traditional belief and people’s immaturity made it impossible for gender equality to become a guiding principle. Can the role wisdom played here in giving men preeminence above women be denied?

The improvements that the Prophet Muhammad had made in the status of women during His lifetime gradually lost their efficacy due to misinterpretations of the ‘ulama, who imposed severe restrictions on women. As a result, women continued to suffer inhuman treatment in the name of religion. Referring to their status before the revelation of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says:

*The status of woman in former times was exceedingly deplorable, for it was the belief of the Orient that it was best for woman to be ignorant. It was considered preferable that she should not know reading or writing in order that she might not be informed of events in the world. Woman was considered to be created for rearing children and attending to the duties of the household. If she pursued educational course, it was deemed contrary to chastity; hence women were prisoners of the household. The houses did not even have windows opening upon the outside world. [PUP 166, emphasis added]*

Women are seldom mentioned in Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism. What has been handed down in both word and practice point to women's subordinate status in communities adhering to these religions. (For cited examples, see *Hope for a Global Ethic* by Brian D. Lepard, pp. 104, 106, 107.) Women were also regarded inferior to men in Zoroastrianism. References to them are hard to find, because Zoroastrian scripture is unavailable in a language readily understood even by ordinary Zoroastrians. That no Zoroastrian woman prior to 2011 held a position of authority is an indication that gender equality was probably not a tenet of the religion. In 2011 the Zoroastrian Council of Priests in Tehran (Anjoman-e-Mobedan) "announced that for the first time in the history of Iran and of the Zoroastrian communities worldwide women had joined the group of *mobeds* (priests) in Iran as *mobedyars* (women priests); the women hold official certificates and perform the lower religious functions and can initiate people into the religion."<sup>13</sup>

In a number of His Tablets 'Abdu'l-Bahá speaks of the abasement suffered by women in the East, which confirms that in the drama of men-women relationship, selfishness and insatiable thirst for control triumphed over justice and fairness, leaving one half of humanity at the mercy of the other half. He says: "*Formerly in India, Persia and throughout the Orient, she was not considered a human being. Certain Arab tribes counted their women in with the live stock.*"<sup>14</sup>

It took humanity several thousand years to arrive at a point in its maturity necessary for the recognition of a simple truth: that having been created in the image and likeness of God, men and women alike are the revealers of the names and attributes of the Creator and enjoy equal rights. However, without the generating influence of a divine revelation it would have been impossible to bring about meaningful change in the psyche and attitude of human beings, to embrace this truth. Since scripture was responsible initially through the use of language in creating ambiguity concerning the status of women, only scripture

could put it right and produce a favorable atmosphere for its enforcement. The morn of administering justice in the world finally dawned in the nineteenth century when Bahá'u'lláh proclaimed unambiguously the principle of gender equality as a prerequisite for establishing unity of humankind, the pivotal principle of His revelation:

*All should know, and in this regard attain the splendors of the sun of certitude, and be illumined thereby: Women and men have been and will always be equal in the sight of God. The Dawning-Place of the Light of God sheddeth its radiance upon all with the same effulgence. Verily God created women for men, and men for women. The most beloved of people before God are the most steadfast and those who have surpassed others in their love for God, exalted be His glory.*<sup>15</sup>

He further confirmed that distinctions have been lifted from between men and women:

*Praised be God, the Pen of the Most High hath lifted distinctions from between His servants and handmaidens, and, through His consummate favours and all-encompassing mercy, hath conferred upon all a station and rank on the same plane. He hath broken the back of vain imaginings with the sword of utterance and hath obliterated the perils of idle fancies through the pervasive power of His might.*<sup>16</sup>

He reiterated the removal of all distinctions and confirmed that believers, regardless of their gender, are regarded on the same plane:

*In this Day the Hand of divine grace hath removed all distinctions. The servants of God and His handmaidens are regarded on the same plane. Blessed is the servant who hath attained unto that which God hath decreed,*

*and likewise the leaf moving in accordance with the breezes of His will.*<sup>17</sup>

## Measures Taken to Establish Gender Equality

Bahá'u'lláh did not only reveal the principle of gender equality, He also provided for its implementation. The right to education is high among the provisions He has revealed, education that is universal and compulsory. One of the reasons gender inequality went unchallenged in the past was women's inability to know for themselves what the holy books had said. As a result, they were unable to go to the source and enquire from the centre of authority when things were vague or appeared prejudicial and discriminatory. They operated in the dark – the darkness of ignorance – and paid a high price for following blindly what had been contrived. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

*... It is incumbent upon the girls of this glorious era to be fully versed in the various branches of knowledge, in sciences and the arts and all the wonders of this preeminent time, that they may then educate their children and train them from their earliest days in the ways of perfection.*<sup>18</sup>

He strongly refutes the argument that women's capabilities do not match those of men's:

*It has been objected by some that woman is not equally capable with man and that she is deficient by creation. This is pure imagination. The difference in capability between man and woman is due entirely to opportunity and education. Heretofore woman has been denied the right and privilege of equal development. If equal opportunity be granted her, there is no doubt she would be the peer of man. History will evidence this. In past ages noted women have arisen in the affairs of nations and surpassed men in their accomplishments....*<sup>19</sup>

He advises the friends:

*Devote ye particular attention to the school for girls, for the greatness of this wondrous Age will be manifested as a result of progress in the world of women. This is why ye observe that in every land the world of women is on the march, and this is due to the impact of the Most Great manifestation, and the power of the teachings of God.<sup>20</sup>*

To fulfill the object of transforming humanity and inspiring its adherents to organize their affairs according to a newly revealed order, divine revelation pays close attention to the capacity of people and requirements of the time it is destined to stay relevant. As discussed earlier, recordings of Holy Books indicate that men and women were created equal and given responsibility to multiply, replenish the earth and subdue it. However humanity's proclivity to move away from the spirit of religious teachings and its tendency to slide back to the way of life to which it was attached previously caused it to come in line with divine teachings with stories and myths it had inherited from earlier generations. Efforts to right the wrong and to restore balance took several thousand years and culminated in Bahá'u'lláh declaring categorically that distinctions have been removed and gender equality restored. However, what had taken root in the hearts and minds could not be obliterated overnight, the ground had to be made ready for its worldwide implementation. This colossal task fell on 'Abdu'l-Bahá to accomplish. This topic has been dealt with in detail in a paper by this author, titled "Preparing Bahá'ís in the East and the West to Embrace Gender Equality".<sup>21</sup> One of the Tablets discussed in that paper is the one 'Abdu'l-Bahá revealed in response to Corinne True who had asked about the exclusion of women from membership of the Universal House of Justice. Contrary to what the generality of the friends believe, He did not say women's exclusion from membership of the House of Justice was for a reason. He said it was "*for a wisdom of Lord*

*God's which will ere long be made manifest as clearly as the sun at high noon.*" But before addressing the question, He emphasized:

*in the sight of Bahá, women are accounted the same as men, and God hath created all humankind in His own image, and after His own likeness. That is, men and women alike are the revealers of His names and attributes, and from the spiritual viewpoint there is no difference between them. Whosoever draweth nearer to God, that one is the most favoured, whether man or woman. How many a handmaid, ardent and devoted, hath, within the sheltering shade of Bahá, proved superior to the men, and surpassed the famous of the earth.*

*The House of Justice, however, according to the explicit text of the Law of God, is confined to men; this for a wisdom of the Lord God's, which will ere long be made manifest as clearly as the sun at high noon. [SWAB 79-80]*

Gender equality has always been a spiritual principle. Bahá'u'lláh has confirmed, "*Women and men have been and will always be equal in the sight of God.*"<sup>22</sup> The mere reiteration of that principle would not have gained women equal rights with men, as attested by historical records, but the lifting of distinctions from between women and men and granting them all a station on the same plane did. What is different in His dispensation is that gender equality is also a social principle with vast implications for womanhood and humanity in general. Another point in need of clarification is this: Initially the friends even in North America, in keeping with their traditional upbringing and mindset, assumed that women were barred from serving on all Houses of Justice, local, national and international.<sup>23</sup> After a period of painstaking education, 'Abdu'l-Bahá explained the intent of the law, which made it

possible for women to serve on all institutions of the Faith, appointed and elected, except that of the Universal House of Justice. Bahá'í women have served in the elected institutions of the Faith many years before other women in the United States gained the right to serve as elected representatives of the inhabitants of that country.

When the Tablet addressed to Corinne True reached its recipient and the contents became known, even though 'Abdu'l-Bahá had confirmed women's exclusion from the membership of the "House of Justice", it was not sufficient. Some men, among them a prominent Bahá'í in the United States, complained because 'Abdu'l-Bahá had said: "*How many a handmaid, ardent and devoted, hath, within the sheltering shade of Bahá, proved superior to the men, and surpassed the famous of the earth.*" 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablet revealed in honour of Thornton Chase speaks for itself:

*It may be that letters addressed to the women believers do indeed contain certain passages written by way of encouragement, but the purpose of such passages is to show that, in this new age, some of the women have outshone some of the men – not that all women have excelled all men! The members of the Spiritual Assembly should do all they can to provide encouragement to the women believers. In this dispensation one should not think in terms of "men" and "women" all are under the shadow of the Word of God and, as they strive the more diligently, so shall their reward be the greater – be they men or women or the frailest of people.<sup>24</sup>*

In lands where religious fanaticism and gender bias against women were extremely strong and impenetrable – Iran being one of them – the process of preparing the community took much longer and women's membership on Bahá'í institutions materialized in 1954, three years before the passing of Shoghi Effendi.

This writer heard about the exclusion of women from membership of the House of Justice before entering primary school, many years before the institution of the Universal House of Justice came into being. At that time in Iran Bahá'í women were not yet eligible to serve even on local and national elected bodies.<sup>25</sup> Therefore it did not come as a surprise. As I grew older, I heard men speculate on what could be the reason for exclusion. I must admit most speculations were offensive even to a very young girl that I was then. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablet brought to me a measure of relief and comfort. Contrary to speculations, He had given no reason for women's exclusion but spoken of "*a wisdom of Lord God's*", which He said, "*will ere long be made manifest as clearly as the sun at high noon.*" Armed with this 'discovery', I challenged the validity of the speculations I had heard repeatedly. Some speculators maintained that reason and wisdom were synonyms! I looked up the definition of the two words and found out the difference.

Further research into the process that led to the degradation of women's status in religion opened the door to a new understanding of the term 'wisdom', especially the kind that human beings have been given the capacity to fathom. The kind of wisdom that 'Abdu'l-Bahá speaks about is that which "*will ere long be made manifest as clearly as the sun at high noon.*" It means that all have the ability to see and understand, unless completely blind. This is the kind of wisdom that all Divine Educators have used to improve women's status without startling the male population and arousing their vehement objection. If not seen in this light, scripture would be implicated in causing women their plight. Prejudices against women were so entrenched, lack of education so widespread, and misinterpretation of scripture so rampant that their status deteriorated steadily until humanity became the recipient of a revelation, which has revolutionized its affairs and set in motion a process leading to the maturity of the human race. 'Abdu'l-Bahá used supreme wisdom in the implementation of the principle of gender equality. He said this Himself in a



Tablet addressed to a group of women in Tihiran, who wished to see the principle in action before members of the community were ready to embrace it:

*I am endeavouring, with Bahá'u'lláh's confirmations and assistance, so to improve the world of the handmaidens that all will be astonished ... Ye need to be calm and composed, so that the work will proceed with wisdom, otherwise there will be such chaos that ye will leave everything and run away. "This newly born babe is traversing in one night the path that needeth a hundred years to tread." In brief, ye should now engage in matters of pure spirituality and not contend with men. 'Abdu'l-Bahá will tactfully take appropriate steps. Be assured. In the end thou wilt thyself exclaim, "This was indeed supreme wisdom!" I appeal to you to obliterate this contention between men and women....*

He closed the Tablet with these words: "No one can on his own achieve anything. 'Abdu'l-Bahá must be well pleased and assist."<sup>26</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá engaged in a process of educating the believers to embrace gender equality.<sup>27</sup> The insurmountable obstacles in the way were different in nature and magnitude in the East and West. He gently addressed the objections and refuted them with loving compassion. Regarding the argument that woman has been created deficient, He says:

*It has been objected by some that woman is not equally capable with man and that she is deficient by creation. This is pure imagination. The difference in capability between man and woman is due entirely to opportunity and education. [PUP 133]*

## The Role of Language in Perpetuating Women's Plight

The opening lines of US Declaration of Independence reiterates in essence what the first chapter of the book of Genesis affirms but leaves out the clarification about both male and female having been created in God's' image:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. – That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.<sup>28</sup>

The word 'men' appears twice in the passage: the first is lower case, the second capitalized. The one is probably general, the other specific. Who knows which is which, for when pronounced they sound alike. Also the 'consent of the governed' is determined through voting. Since the American women did not have the right to vote when the Declaration of Independence was written in 1776, it is assumed that their consent or lack thereof was of no consequence. No wonder then that US Declaration of Independence did not achieve gender equality. It was through civil liberty and education that the eyes of women were opened and the fire of longing for emancipation blazoned in their hearts. Some women became anti-slavery activists and campaigned in earnest for its abolition. Having been oppressed and subjugated for countless centuries, they understood what slavery entailed and how abhorrent a practice it was. One of the women activists, Lucretia Mott, a Quaker minister, attended as a delegate the World Anti-Slavery Convention held in London, England in 1840, but was refused the right, along with other female delegates attending the Convention, to speak. In fact they were asked to leave. The refusal to seat the women delegates was the motivating factor for Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the

wife of another delegate from the United States, to get together and discuss the need for holding “a convention to discuss the rights of women.”<sup>29</sup> That convention took place in Seneca Falls, New York, in the summer of 1948 at about the same time the Conference of Badasht was held.

To deliberate on the plight of women and propose changes to mitigate the effect of maltreatment and injustices they had suffered, the gathering produced a document known as the Declaration of Sentiments, which stipulates: “We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness....”

The simultaneous occurrence of these two events in venues thousands of miles apart with the theme of breaking away from traditions of the past, as well as the role that women played in the proceedings of both are truly astounding. Although the agenda of the two conferences was rejection of the status quo, the outcome was very different. Those assembled at Seneca Falls forged ahead with their aims. Fully cognizant of the role that linguistic biases had played in the degradation of women’s status in religion, they took measures to arrest the process and right the wrong. The organizer, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, financed the production of a women’s bible. She also financed the work of the women activists.

At Badasht Conference only one woman participated in the proceedings. She was known as Qurratu’l-‘Ayn and became better known as Tahirih (the Pure). She was one of the central players at the Conference. To declare the dawn of a New Day and the emancipation of women through the Bab’s Advent, she appeared unveiled in an assemblage of men, who confessed belief in the Báb but were utterly unprepared to see the unveiled face of a woman adherent of the nascent Faith. By removing her veil, something strictly imposed on women by Islamic tradition and upheld fiercely by religious leaders,

Tahirih proclaimed the dawn of a new Era and the invalidation of traditions that had kept women backward. She was sentenced to death for espousing the nascent Cause and executed in 1852, the year Bahá'u'lláh received intimation of His Mission while imprisoned in the Siyah Chal (Black Pit) of Tihran. Shoghi Effendi refers to “this great Babi heroine” as “the first woman suffrage martyr, who, at her death, turning to the one in whose custody she had been placed, had boldly declared: ‘You can kill me as soon as you like, but you cannot stop the emancipation of women.’” [GPB 75]

What prompted Tahirih at Badasht and some North American women at Seneca Falls to go against the norm was directly related to the maltreatment of women and the denial of their God-given rights. Slavery and women’s subjugation are kindred subjects. They are ancient practices, heinous and oppressive. However, the two differ in one respect: Slavery became a burden on man’s conscience long before did the maltreatment of women.

Those desirous of having power over women and controlling their affairs perceive gender inequality as a matter sanctioned in scripture. Keeping women ignorant and under the thumb of the authority of men is one thing all religious zealots agree to uphold. To give credence to their misinterpretations, they use linguistic nuances as the vehicle. To prevent women from recognizing and taking action against maltreatment, they have made it look as though God has intended men to be superior in creation. As gender inequality is seemingly based on scripture, its eradication only scripture could sanction. Granting women equality with men through legislation is insufficient. Even the United Nation’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights,<sup>30</sup> adopted by UN General Assembly on 10 December 1948, a hundred years after the conferences held at Badasht and Seneca Falls<sup>31</sup> has been ineffective to restore to women their rights in countries ruled by religious law. Moreover, whatever is given at will can be taken away at will, and examples of this are

provided repeatedly in history. A case in point is the situation of women in Iran before and after the Islamic Revolution.

In North America, the cradle of freedom, women rights activists have been unable to have the equal rights amendment ratified. The amendment to the US Constitution designed to guarantee equal rights for women was first proposed in 1923. Although it passed both houses of Congress by 1972, sufficient number of state legislatures did not vote in favor it by the deadlines the Congress had set. The opposition was based on a number of reasons, traditional gender roles pre-eminent among them. As a result, it has not yet become the law. Further efforts are being made at the federal and state levels to have it adopted. During His travels in the West, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke repeatedly about the subject. The following is an example:

*Neither sex is superior to the other in the sight of God. Why then should one sex assert the inferiority of the other, withholding just rights and privileges as though God had given His authority for such a course of action?* [PT 161]

The underlying purpose of divine revelations, Bahá’u’lláh says, “*hath been to educate all men, that they may, at the hour of death, ascend, in the utmost purity and sanctity and with absolute detachment, to the throne of the Most High*” [GWB 157]. To educate humanity, the Revealers of religion have had to use the medium of language, which like everything in life is subject to change. The earliest religious records that have survived, regardless of how they were worded in the original language, have been translated to a language highly prejudicial to the cause of womanhood, as discussed earlier. Using masculine terms, such as ‘man’, ‘men’ and pronouns, such as ‘he’, ‘his’ and ‘him’ indistinctively regardless of whether they refer to man, the male, or to humanity in general have worked to women’s disadvantage. The realization of gender equality, a vital aspect of the principle of unity of humankind, requires

dealing with this dilemma, which has been a major cause of the degradation of women since time immemorial.

The capacity of language to convey meanings other than those traditionally assigned to words has been exploited in every respect but that of gender equality. The time seems propitious to let the use of unbiased language rid humanity of the remaining barriers intervening between it and the full realization of gender equality.

Bahá'u'lláh's writings are revealed in both Persian and Arabic. These two languages are very different in the way the pronouns are used. Unlike Persian, a non-gender-specific language, which uses the same pronoun for God and third singular person whether man or woman, Arabic is gender specific, it uses different pronouns when referring to a man or a woman. It also uses the plural of masculine pronoun for referring to humanity in general.<sup>32</sup>

The problem of using masculine pronoun whether it refers to God, to man specifically or to humanity in general is accentuated when Persian Writings are translated to English, because all non-gender-specific Persian terms and pronouns are changed to masculine. Since translations to all other languages are based on the English approved version, this linguistic bias is promoted and perpetuated throughout the Bahá'í world, making it most difficult, if not impossible, to control their ramifications throughout the dispensation.

Looking deeper into challenges that lack of linguistic clarity poses for translators of Bahá'í Writings provides us with valuable insights. In a Tablet revealed in Persian regarding the membership of the Supreme Tribunal, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

*... the question of universal peace, about which Bahá'u'lláh says that the Supreme Tribunal must be established: although the League of Nations has been brought into existence, yet it is incapable of establishing universal peace. But the Supreme Tribunal which*

*Bahá'u'lláh has described will fulfill this sacred task with the utmost might and power. And His plan is this: that the national assemblies of each country and nation – that is to say parliaments – should elect two or three persons who are the choicest men of that nation, and are well informed concerning international laws and the relations between governments and aware of the essential needs of the world of humanity in this day... From among these people the members of the Supreme Tribunal will be elected, and all mankind will thus have a share therein, for every one of these delegates is fully representative of his nation... [SWAB 305]*

After the English translation of the Tablet was published in *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* and quoted in the compilation on Peace, the phrase 'the choicest men of that nation' was found to be inaccurate. In the original Persian 'Abdu'l-Bahá says 'the choicest persons', not 'the choicest men'. When the mistranslation was brought to the attention of the Universal House of Justice, it instructed the responsible department to look into the matter. After thorough investigation, the phrase was changed to 'the choicest of that nation', which is not gender specific. Publishing Trusts were then informed to make the correction. It is not known how many made the correction and informed the friends, who had purchased earlier versions. Meanwhile, unaware of this development, the friends continue to quote in their writings and speeches the phrase that proved to be inaccurate. As late as November 2012, a Nineteen Day Feast letter, circulated in the United States, quoted 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement on the subject of peace and Supreme Tribunal, which did not reflect the correction. As a result, some Bahá'ís are of the opinion that women are ineligible for membership of the Supreme Tribunal, in contradiction to what the Universal House of Justice has stated in a letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of New Zealand, which had asked the Supreme Body

about the eligibility of women for membership on the Supreme Tribunal:

With regard to the status of women, the important point for Bahá'ís to remember is that in face of the categorical pronouncements in Bahá'í Scripture establishing the equality of men and women, the ineligibility of women for membership of the Universal House of Justice does not constitute evidence of the superiority of men over women. It must also be borne in mind that women are not excluded from any other international institution of the Faith. They are found among the ranks of the Hands of the Cause. They serve as members of the International Teaching Centre and as Continental Counsellors. And, there is nothing in the Text to preclude the participation of women in such future international bodies as the Supreme Tribunal.<sup>33</sup>

Another example is the retranslation of a phrase in a Tablet from 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Corinne True about the ineligibility of women for membership of the Universal House of Justice. The retranslated phrase reads: "*for, as hath been stated in the text of the Book, both the head and the members of the House of Justice must be men.*" When the retranslation was carefully checked against the original text of the Tablet, it became clear that it was inaccurate. The inaccuracy was reported, investigated and corrected to read: "*...for, as hath been stated in the text of the Book, both the head and the members of the House of Justice are men.*"<sup>34</sup>

One of the many blessings that members of the worldwide Bahá'í community enjoy is the duty and privilege of immersing themselves in the ocean of Bahá'u'lláh's Words and of using the writings of the authorized Interpreters to enhance their understanding of the verities enshrined in His revelation. They also enjoy the right to seek clarification from the Supreme governing Body of the Bahá'í Faith regarding anything that appears obscure, or in the case of translations, anything that



might be inaccurate. No matter how careful the translators of Sacred Writings are and how meticulously the process of review is, the possibility of human error cannot be completely ruled out. The believers familiar with the languages of revelation (Persian and Arabic) would render a valuable service if they paid careful attention to translations and compared them against the original. If anything looks or feels inaccurate in meaning or appearance, report it to the right authority and make sure that it is documented. It would also be most helpful for the translators to be extra mindful of any and all traditional pitfalls.

Having a clear vision about men and women enjoying equal rights has tremendous ramifications not only for this dispensation but also for the distant future. In light of Bahá'u'lláh's statement that "*... were He to pronounce one of the leaves to be the manifestation of all His excellent titles, unto no one is given the right to utter why or wherefore, and should one do so he would be regarded as a disbeliever in God and be numbered with such as have repudiated His Truth*", [TB 185] the appearance of female Manifestations of God in future is not beyond the realm of possibility. What we do and say today undoubtedly has repercussions in the future. Our words and actions today have the potency to intensify the afflictions or mitigate their effects when the time for renewal comes again. Let us all work for a prejudice-free society and remember the words of the Universal House of Justice:

World order can be founded only on an unshakeable consciousness of the oneness of mankind, a spiritual truth which all the human sciences confirm. Anthropology, physiology, psychology, recognize only one human species, albeit infinitely varied in the secondary aspects of life. Recognition of this truth requires abandonment of prejudice – prejudice of every kind – race, class, colour, creed, nation, sex, degree of material civilization, everything which enables people to

consider themselves superior to others. Acceptance of the oneness of mankind is the first fundamental prerequisite for reorganization and administration of the world as one country, the home of humankind. Universal acceptance of this spiritual principle is essential to any successful attempt to establish world peace...<sup>35</sup>

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> *Women: Bahá'í Writings on the Equality of Men and Women*, the Bahá'í Publishing Trust, London, Revised edition 1990, #2.
- <sup>2</sup> *Women*, #58
- <sup>3</sup> *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*, Introduction,
- <sup>4</sup> *Women*, #10.
- <sup>5</sup> The King James translation of the Bible, from which this and other quotations cited in this article are taken, is based on the Greek translation of the Hebrew original of the Book.
- <sup>6</sup> Malala, the Pakistani young girl who survived a vicious attempt on her life by religious fundamentalists in that country, is a case in point.
- <sup>7</sup> Article by this author in *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, volume 8, number 1, p. 47.
- <sup>8</sup> From a previously unpublished Tablet in Persian, revealed jointly in honor of Jinab-i-Mirza Mu'min and his wife. Mirza Mu'min's wife seems to be the sister of Jinab-i Ibn-i-Abhar.
- <sup>9</sup> *Women*, number 10
- <sup>10</sup> *The Quran*, trans. by George Sale (London, Frederick Warne and Co.), p. 71.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p. 32
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p. 77
- <sup>13</sup> "Women's Ordination" in Zoroastrianism, quoted in *Wikipedia*.
- <sup>14</sup> *Women*, #28
- <sup>15</sup> *Women*, #58.
- <sup>16</sup> *Women*, #2
- <sup>17</sup> *Women*, #3
- <sup>18</sup> *Women*, #46

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<sup>19</sup> *Women*, #47

<sup>20</sup> *Women*, #52

<sup>21</sup> *Lights of 'Irfan* Book 12, at [http://irfancoolloquia.org/100/ma'ani\\_equality](http://irfancoolloquia.org/100/ma'ani_equality)

<sup>22</sup> *Women*, number 58, also *Compilation of Compilations*, vol. II, p. 379

<sup>23</sup> It was as late as 1920 when women in America gained the right to vote.

<sup>24</sup> *Women*, #19

<sup>25</sup> The election of Bahá'í women in Iran to Local and National Spiritual Assemblies was a goal of Shoghi Effendi's Ten Year Global Plan. The goal was accomplished at Ridvan 1954.

<sup>26</sup> *Women*, #13

<sup>27</sup> For a detailed account, see "Preparing Bahá'í Communities in the East and West to Embrace Gender Equality" by this author, *Lights of 'Irfan*, book twelve, pp 195-218

<sup>28</sup> *The Declaration of Sentiments* (Seneca Falls Convention, 1848)

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> "The General Assembly recognizes that the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world, human rights should be protected by the rule of law, friendly relations between nations must be fostered, the peoples of the UN have affirmed their faith in human rights, the dignity and the worth of the human person, the equal rights of men and women and are determined to promote social progress, better standards of life and larger freedom and have promised to promote human rights and a common understanding of these rights." (*Simplified Version of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Summary of Preamble)

<sup>31</sup> The full text is published by the United Nations on its website.

<sup>32</sup> This subject has been dealt with in considerable detail in "The Effect of Philosophical and Linguistic Gender Biases on the Degradation of Women's Status in Religion", *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, vol. 8, number 1.

<sup>33</sup> Letter from the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of New Zealand dated 31 May 1988.

<sup>34</sup> Secretariat letter dated 14 October 1987, attaching a memorandum from the Research Department, of the same date.

<sup>35</sup> *The Promise of World Peace*. Quoted in *Women*, #35

# On Existence and Qualities of the Human Soul

Farjam Majd

## Abstract

In comparing animals and humans, or as put more modernly, comparing humans with *other* animals, the questions of the existence, nature, and necessity of a human soul often come up.

The question of existence of the human soul may be explored from different perspectives. For example, this question may be posed as “is there a human soul?” If so, what is it? why do we need a soul? why not just the brain? Is it needed to explain something, such as “continuation of life after physical death?” If so, is it just a contrivance to answer such peripheral questions?

To attempt a rational treatment of these questions, a two-phase approach is adopted: first, a rational foundation is laid out, and second, the principles established as part of this rational foundation are applied to specific questions, such as those posed above. The overall argument is the result of a modern treatment and integration of several diverse concepts Proclaimed by Bahá’u’lláh and explained by Abdu’l-Bahá. These diverse concepts are presented aided by various quotes from the Bahá’í sacred Writings.

In the first phase, science and rationality are compared and their relationship established. A principle of primacy of logic and rationality is developed that includes science as a subset. Relationships are categorized into two broad classes: physical and rational. A model of thought, human or otherwise, is developed to precisely define what it means to think. The

central role of analogy to cognitive activities is described. The physical world is defined as a realm where the fundamental dimensions of time and space govern over all that is contained therein. Further, a number of realms of existence, or “Kingdoms,” including Mineral, Plant, Animal, and Human Kingdoms are described.

In the second phase, a part scientific and part rational methodology is employed to specifically answer the direct and indirect questions about the existence of the human soul. It is argued that no physical system, including the human brain, can comprehend rational relationships because the rational and physical realms do not overlap. This aspect differentiates man from animal. One aspect of spirituality is described as the ability to comprehend rational relationship. However, since computers clearly represent and process rational relationships, additional explanations are appropriate, and indeed, required. Comprehension of rational relationships is not the same as their representation or processing. Comprehension of an abstract or rational relationship is realized only if it is analogically related and successfully applied to a domain different from the one in which it was discovered, when the two domains are materially disjoint.

It is concluded that the mere fact of comprehension of abstract rational relationships necessitates the existence and assistance of a non-physical entity, the human soul, which provides the power of rational comprehension from outside the physical realm. The Kingdoms of existence further explain how the human soul fits in a unified world of God.

## Introduction

Here is an exercise for the reader: What holds the earth suspended in space? (a) The *World Turtle*, (b) the *World Elephant*, (c) the *World Serpent*, or (d) something else? This exercise holds several important keys to answering the main question posed by this paper: whether an entity called the

human soul exists. The correct answer is (d): something else, namely, the mutual gravitational pull between the earth and the sun in balance with the centrifugal force acting on the earth due to its orbital motion around the sun. And because no friction exists in the vacuum of space, these balanced forces will continue for a very long time or until other cosmic forces intervene.

In ancient times, when the law of gravity and celestial mechanics were unknown, people had to answer the question: “if everything is ultimately resting on the earth, then what is the earth resting on?!” Hence, different cultures came up with variations of the above (a)-(c) explanations using mythical creatures with magical powers. The main reasons for coming up with these erroneous explanations were lack of knowledge and bad assumptions. We already talked briefly about some of the knowledge they lacked. Some of the bad assumptions included the assumption that space has intrinsic “up” and “down” directions. And that objects, including earth itself, “naturally” fall “down” (rather than being actively pulled towards another object due to the gravitational force between them without regard to an up or a down), as confirmed by their common experiences on earth. Hence, they assumed that the earth has to fall “down” in the absence of something holding it up. Based on these assumptions, they had to devise an explanation about what holds up the earth. So, they did.

The key lessons we learn from the above exercise are as follows. One, unexplained phenomena need an explanation. Two, lack of knowledge and/or the wrong assumptions produce the wrong explanations. And three, alternative explanations must actually explain what is missing from the others. We will apply these key lessons to our question about the existence of soul in the rest of this paper.

A number of related questions come to mind: What is the nature of the soul, if it exists? Is it energy? Is it a force of nature? Is it a contrived and imaginary construct to explain

what we cannot otherwise explain? We will revisit these questions when we have established the necessary foundations.

And why do we even care about the existence, or not, of the human soul? When we define the problem below in more specific terms, we will realize that the current explanations fall short. Hence, we have to come up with another explanation, which happens to have major implications about our nature and our goals and objectives in life.

This paper is structured in two parts. In Part I, we will define and describe several foundational concepts. In Part II, we will set out to use the results from Part I to prove the existence and some of the characteristics of the human soul.

## Concept of Soul or Spirit

Knowing what it is that we are discussing is always a good start. So, let us start with examining what we mean by “soul” or “spirit.” Spirits are highly abused creatures. These terms and the loose concepts behind them have been used to mean many things, some even contradictory in essence. We only present some anecdotal evidence of these uses here for the purpose of clarifying what is meant by the use of these terms in the present paper.

The terms “soul” and “spirit” are sometimes used interchangeably and sometimes in distinct ways. For example, people talk about “the soul of a nation,” meaning the essential qualities that define that nation. Sometimes we talk about a “spiritual experience,” meaning a deeply and emotionally gratifying or illuminating experience. Even today, the word “ravani” in the Persian language means both mental/psychological and spiritual. The reason for this close association is that before the advent of psychology and advancement of medical and biological sciences that shed light on some of the workings of human mind and brain, the mental faculty was believed to be the exclusive domain of the human

soul. So, a psychopath was thought to have a sick soul or spirit. Similarly, soul and/or spirit have had varying associations with the sacred, the mystical, the divine, and the like in different cultural traditions. But probably the most commonly associated concept with these terms is that of essence or core. In many common usages of these terms, including the above examples, the connotation of essence is clearly visible.

However, in this paper we will mainly use the term “soul” and we mean something very specific by it. For our purposes, the soul is defined as a non-physical entity in transcendental communication with the brain, which differentiates humans from animals and is the seat and source of general intelligence.

### The Essential Questions

*And now concerning thy question regarding the soul of man and its survival after death. Know thou of a truth that the soul, after its separation from the body, will continue to progress until it attaineth the presence of God, in a state and condition which neither the revolution of ages and centuries, nor the changes and chances of this world, can alter. — Bahá'u'lláh<sup>1</sup>*

In the passage above, Bahá'u'lláh goes straight to the main question. However, before getting there, we have to contend with more elementary questions first. Now, with the above definition of soul in mind, we can pose some essential questions to guide our analysis.

The main one of these questions is this: Is there a human soul? There are three main types of answers to an existential question like this. A first type of answer is based on direct facts. An example of this type is asking whether a cow has horns. By direct observation of the fact that cows have horns, we can answer this question. Since we have no direct or objective visibility into the spiritual realm, if such realm even



exists, we cannot answer the question of the existence of human soul on this basis.

A second type of answer is based on best explanation. This is also referred to as Ockham's razor, a rational principle attributed to the 14th century British logician, William of Ockham (c. 1287-1347), stating that among competing hypotheses based on known facts the one with the fewest unsupported assumptions is generally the best hypotheses, at least until more facts are known or more assumptions are verified. The "razor" alludes to the operation of cutting away, figuratively speaking, of unnecessary assumptions and explanations to come up with the remaining best explanation. An example of this is two competing hypotheses for explaining a traffic jam by either assuming time of day rush hour or occurrence of an accident. This is a promising path for us.

And a third type of answer to existential questions is based on inherent relationships. An example of this is knowing an energy source must exist if work is observed being performed, because work cannot be performed unless energy is being applied. This is also a promising path for us.

Hence, the analysis that follows is based on a combination of the latter two types of answers.

Other related questions to the question of the existence of soul include: What is the soul? Why is it needed? Why not just the brain to explain higher intelligence? Why would humans have a soul but not animals? Is the soul just a contrivance to explain other things such as immortality or another world? And the questions related to brain can be repeated for computers and processors.

To answer the above questions, we need to define what intelligence is, what thinking means, how physical computing systems, including the brain, work, and how the soul fits into the picture.

## PART I: Foundational Concepts

“Make things as simple as *possible*, but not simpler!” This quote, attributed to Albert Einstein, is essentially the flip side of Ockham’s razor. While Ockham’s razor helps us set the upper limits of complexity in our hypotheses, Einstein’s razor, as this quote is sometimes called, helps us set the lower limits. The implication of Einstein’s razor for us is that we need at least a certain number of foundational concepts to properly analyze and answer these questions without losing any essential information or knowledge in the process based on which we may come up with the wrong hypotheses.

We surmise that the following foundations will be needed: a definition of our general approach and methodology, a clear model of thinking, a definition of intelligence, a simple model of brain and its operation, a brief description of some of the methods and limitations of Artificial Intelligence (AI), and the central role of analogy in intelligence.

### Methodology and Approach

The methodology employed includes a combination of scientific knowledge and rational reasoning, each entailing a number of analytical methods. Several particular analytical tools and/or procedure are essential for any proper and reliable analysis. Sometimes these tools are explicitly defined and laid out and sometimes they are in the form of unwritten or implicit assumptions. No matter explicit or implicit, if one or more of these tools are missing uncertainty and error will creep into the analysis and resulting hypotheses. These procedures and tools include at least a clear statement of the purpose and objectives of the analysis, domain models (partly determined by the objectives), clear definition and/or specification of terms and concepts, and basic domain principles. Other analytical tools and actions, such as determining the right criteria to know success or failure of results, rules of logic that govern all analytical processes, probability and statistics, and many other

procedures are often required, which we have to skip discussing in the interest of brevity and focus. Knowing the purpose and objectives of the analysis allows the determination of an appropriate domain or system model, the applicable principles, and appropriate criteria for the application of the principles.

A model of something in a particular domain generally includes the system components, the relationships between those components, and the domain operating principles. For example, the model of a democratic government may include elected leaders, an electorate or voters, laws governing elections, freedom of speech and assembly, etc. A model is generally not unique and changes with the application. For example, if we want to analyze a democratic government for judicial effectiveness we have to use a certain model of the government and certain set of principles and criteria, while if we want to analyze it for economic productivity, we have to use a different model.

Definition, and more generally, specification of concepts and terms is not only critical to any analysis, but required. Specification is always in the context of a chosen model. That's why the definition of the same thing may be different with respect to different domain models. Without having an adequate specification, we quite literally do not know what we are talking about. Let's see why. The meaning of "definition" is often incompletely understood. More often than not, "definition" is thought to be mere naming or labeling of a concept or a thing. But it is more than that. A "definition" is a *named set of attributes or characteristics*. Like models, definitions are not unique or fixed and change according to the purpose of the definition. For example, if we have the set of attributes: {a frame, two in-line wheels connected to the frame, a handle connected to the frame, a pedal, and a chain connected to the rear wheel}, and we assign a name to it, such as "Bicycle," then we have a definition of a bicycle. Now we can assign a different name, such as "Zebra," but the list of attributes still specify a bicycle as we commonly know it. This point is

important because we cannot change the nature of an entity merely by renaming it, as is sometimes done by unscrupulous politicians or sales people to mislead people by saying one thing but meaning another. Two entities with different sets of attributes are still different even if we call them by the same name. For example, renaming a cow as a “horse,” does not make a cow a horse, in spite of some obvious similarities between the two.

All relationships and operations in a particular domain are based on the principles that govern that domain. For example, if we are analyzing a natural eco system, then we must know the important principles that govern eco systems such as food chain, reproduction rates, existence of water, territorial behaviors of animals, etc. Once we know some of the relevant principles, we can apply them to a particular eco system, such as the American Rocky mountains. Similarly, other domains of discourse have their own principles.

The general approach taken here is the identification of a property, a behavior, or other characteristic, which cannot be explained by other than a non-physical soul. But, how do we identify such a characteristic, if one even exists? A good starting point may be the sharp distinction between man and other animals, speaking from a materialistic point of view that considers man as just another animal.

Besides some anatomical and physiological differences, and even though by widespread scientific accounts we share anywhere between 95% and 99% of our DNA with chimpanzees, there is absolutely no comparison between the general intelligence and cognitive abilities of humans and any other animal, including chimps, dolphins, crows, and octopi, as the acknowledged intelligence champions of the wild. What explains this enormous difference? the 1% difference in our DNA? May be. But, this is not an argument for or against. It is merely an observation looking for an explanation. What we want to find out is whether such differences can be explained

by biology alone. Hence, the essential question boils down to the source of our general intelligence.

### Science and Rationality

With the ubiquitous success of science and scientific theories, especially over the last couple of centuries or so, many people have come to believe that “scientific” is synonymous with “valid,” and even further, that science is the only path to the truth. That is, a theory is only valid if it is scientific and anything that is not scientific is invalid. However, even though science does cover a vast area of human intellectual endeavors and discoveries, based on our brief discussion of the scientific method below, it does not cover all types of analysis. Science chiefly operates using inductive reasoning. A whole class of rational analysis, which is based on deductive reasoning fundamentally lies outside the domain of science. Simply put, science is a subset of the rational analysis, not vice versa. Hence, everything valid is not necessarily scientific and anything that is not scientific is not necessarily invalid. Of course, scientific discovery is a complex business involving all manners of rational activity at different stages, including deductive reasoning. Nevertheless, the central rational component and the overarching method of scientific endeavor is inductive reasoning.

The scientific method may be generally formulated as follows:<sup>2</sup>

1. Make observations
2. Formulate a hypothesis to explain the observations
3. Test or verify the hypothesis using controlled experiments

The scientific method is an inductive process: we go from specific observations to general conclusions. Inductive reasoning is by nature, strictly speaking, inconclusive and evolutionary. The conclusion is only as good as the current

collection of observations allows. The next observation may alter the conclusion or theory. For example, if one observes a sequence of measurements of some quantity (for example, the temperature of an object) such as 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, ..., and is then asked to predict what the next number in the sequence would be, he may present the hypothesis that this pattern is defined by the sequence of even numbers, and thus the next number would be 14. However, if the next number revealed in the observed sequence happens to be 25, then the assumed hypothesis turns out to be wrong and a different hypotheses will be needed. This inductive phenomenon is well known in the history of science and is behind all scientific progress: as new data are discovered, scientific explanations evolve to explain both the old and the new data and correct the deficiencies and errors in the old theories.

It is noteworthy to recognize that error is a built-in feature of science and the driver of scientific progress through a highly intelligent and systematic trial and error process. So, it is rather ironic that what some have elevated to the station of ultimate criterion for discovering and judging the truth, thrives on error as an inherent characteristic.

The inductive process is markedly different from the deductive process. In contrast to the inductive process, the deductive process, which is a main component of rational reasoning, is conclusive and fixed. Once a truth is deductively proven, it will never change, in contrast to scientific discoveries and theories. That's why ancient mathematical theories in geometry and algebra, or other areas of mathematics, once proven, have never been "improved." The area of a circle,  $A$ , represented as  $\pi r^2$ , where  $r$  is the radius of the circle and  $\pi$  is a constant (3.14...), was discovered and proven deductively, not scientifically. They did not cut out an assortment of circular discs and measure their areas in a laboratory to come up with this formula. Samples or observed circles, although examined for insight, did not play a pivotal or necessary role in proving this formula; deductive reasoning did.

As a matter of fact, this formula may be derived and proven by dividing a circle into an infinite number of slices, like a pizza. But since no physical object, such as sample discs, can be divided infinitely, the proof is abstract and purely rational, not scientific, strictly speaking.

Going a step further, it can be a rude awakening for some to discover that mathematics itself, the bedrock of all science and scientific endeavors, is not scientific! By its very nature, deductive knowledge is absolute and immutable within the system in which it was proven, while scientific knowledge is inherently evolutionary and constantly changing.

A closely related question is what does it mean to prove something, such as the existence of human soul? How do we know we have proven what we set out to prove? Having a “proof” generally means a valid conclusion is reached about a statement. Mathematically, the proof of a theorem means that the theorem, as defined, is true and that it contains no errors. For example, a theorem in geometry may state that the sum of internal angles of a triangle is  $180^\circ$ . Given the definitions of a triangle, angle, and sum, it can be mathematically proven that this theorem is true. Proof is based on the deductive process. In contrast, a scientific theory is only inductively *verified*, not proved, as discussed above.

The existence of a proof requires two main elements: facts and principles. The process of deduction, also known as reasoning, is the application of known principles or rules, which themselves may be previously proven theorems, to facts to prove a new theorem. Thus, for a proof of the existence of soul, facts related to the supposed properties of the human soul are needed that require an explanation, and principles are needed to show the new theorem is consistent with other known principles. In his many discourses about the soul, Abdul-Bahá did not shy away from propounding rational proofs of the existence of soul based on facts and principles, some of which are briefly recounted here.

As such, because of the obvious limitations of observability and testability, two of the essential components of the scientific method, imposed by a purportedly non-physical soul, the proof of its existence is rational in nature with a good dose of scientific knowledge thrown in the mix to provide the facts for the argument.

A few words are in order about what does not constitute proof. Stories, personal experiences, conjectures, and other similar evidences, even if true, do not rise to the level of proof. This assertion is not meant to belittle such evidence or aver their invalidity, but rather to distinguish them from a logical proof.

### The Primacy of Logic

In the analysis of subjects that have strong connections to science, in reality or in our perception, the following discussion is of prime importance because it clarifies the position of logic with respect to science. Logic is the glue that binds together other knowledge to come up with valid conclusions and is the one indispensable tool of rational discourse. As such, logic has priority over science, laws of physics, biology, the brain, and any other area of human endeavor. Let's see why.

Logic is, at its very core, a specification of the existential requirements of any conclusion or result. Mathematically, three necessary and sufficient logical operators exist to specify any logical statement: AND, OR, and NOT. There is a mathematically equivalent single operator, NAND, that may serve the same purpose, but the original set of three operators is more intuitive. The AND operator specifies all the requirements (among those elements being considered) for a true conclusion, the OR operator specifies one or more of the requirements (that is, all are not necessary) for a true conclusion, and NOT specifies an element that must not be true for a conclusion to be true. Simple examples can illustrate the concept: *water* AND *soil* are needed for a flower to grow; you



can go to the store by *bicycle* **OR** *on foot*; a door that is **NOT** *locked* can be opened. In each of the foregoing examples, the operator is shown in underlined bold font, the requirements are shown in italics, and the conclusion or effect resulting from the requirements is shown in normal text. Thus, as we initially observed, the logical operators specify the requirements of existence of the result (or a true conclusion, in the context of information processing).

Logic is also like an information pipe, to use a metaphor. It is content-invariant and knowledge-agnostic. Logic is not concerned with what specific subject we are reasoning about. It also is not concerned about the correctness of the knowledge we use in our reasoning. For example, if we state that “an elephant fits in a tea cup; a tea cup fits in my pocket, therefore, an elephant fits in my pocket,” we are using perfectly *valid* logic and correct reasoning, but with faulty knowledge. This is known as valid but *unsound* logic (or reasoning) due to the incorrect data or knowledge.

However, logic is not quite as simple as one may be lead to believe from the foregoing examples. What we briefly discussed above is *propositional* logic, dealing with logical constants. Higher order *predicate logic*, such as the first order predicate logic, the second order predicate logic, etc., deal with logical functions and quantifiers and are well-known subjects in the field of mathematical logic. The difference between propositional logic and predicate logic, apart from technical mathematical criteria such as whether or not they are *consistent* and *complete* systems, is that propositional logic is concerned with logical constants whose truth values are fixed. While predicate logic deals with logical variables and functions. This is loosely analogous to arithmetic and algebra, where arithmetic is used to operate on constant numbers and algebra is used to deal with variable numbers and functions of numbers.

Just as the complexity of advanced mathematics does not change the fact that it is basically a study of quantities and how

they are related to each other, the complexity level of logic does not change the fact that it is about existential conditions of rational conclusions.

How does all this show the primacy of logic over science and the laws of physics? It is a question of dependence: for any entities A and B, if B depends on A, then A *must* exist first and B can only exist afterwards. Existence of an entity precedes every property of the entity, because no other property of the entity can exist before the entity itself exists. Since logic defines the existential conditions of any entity, it comes first. That includes all physical phenomena and laws of nature. We may have gotten a bit too abstract here, so let's come back to earth, to a more concrete and practical level. As far as we know at this point of human advancement, the laws of nature, such as the laws of thermodynamics, gravity, quantum physics, and other such fundamental laws clearly underlie the physical reality we perceive. Our understanding of these laws change over time, yet the logical rules we use in our reasoning to rationally understand and analyze these very laws of nature remain unchanged. Conversely, no matter how our scientific understanding of the laws of physics or nature change, our logical methods do not. Thus, as far as our cognition is concerned, our understanding of natural phenomena through science is dependent upon logic, but the rules of logic are not dependent on our understanding of the laws of nature. Hence, the priority and primacy of logic.

### Thinking: A Useful Model

Nothing can be understood in vacuum. Understanding requires a frame of reference, or more generally, a model within which a phenomenon can be placed, defined and analyzed. Since we made general intelligence and its source the centerpiece of our discourse and solely a property of the soul (no pun intended), we need to clearly define and characterize the context of intelligence, namely, thinking. Intelligence is the mental tool with which we think. But what is thinking?

We can start with a simple definition of thinking and develop and expand it to provide a rich context to understand intelligence. At the most fundamental and elementary level, thinking is the mental or symbolic counterpart of some external phenomenon, usually, the reality. When you feel thirsty and think to yourself: “I am going to get some water to drink,” what are you doing? The mere fact of thinking does not get any water into your body, nor does it quench your thirst. You are simulating reality in advance. The electrochemical impulses and interactions between the neurons in your brain, that is, the thought of drinking water, is not the physical act of drinking water, it is a symbolic or mental prelude to it. But thinking doesn’t have to be about some action in the future. Memories of the past or impressions of what may be happening to you now, have similar relationships to reality. They are symbolic representations of something real that happened in the past or is happening now. Nor is thinking limited to actual events. Thinking can also be about *potential* reality, things which may exist or happen later, even if such thinking is pure fantasy and cannot happen in reality, such as thinking about time travel. Put slightly more precisely, thinking is the tracking of reality in time, because everything, including real events and thinking about those events all flow along the axis of time.

We can apply this definition of thinking to all examples of our everyday experiences as well as deeper thoughts. For example, imagine what you do and how it tracks reality when you are planning for shopping: you mentally follow your travel route to the store, visualize market shelves, make payment, and travel back, all in your mind. Similarly, you are mentally tracking reality when you remember a birthday party, or doing an analysis of molecular behavior in a chemical reaction.

### *What is reality?*

According to some, reality is in the eyes of the beholder. And there is a certain amount of truth to this statement. However, something must be there to behold in the first place, even if

different people see the same thing differently. With this notion in mind, we now have to define reality in broad enough terms to allow for different perceptions of it by different people while preserving the integrity of our definition.

If we define thinking in terms of reality, then we must know what reality is or at least how to characterize its important attributes as related to thinking. The real world may be accurately characterized by a model comprising a set of objects and the relationships between those objects. This model may have some grey areas that may be regarded as problematic or awkward, but our purpose here is not to have a discourse about the details of reality but to define what thinking means.

In this model of reality we have two components, which have to be described. Simply put, an object is a “thing,” an entity made of matter. This definition of an object is broader than it may look at first glance. Suffice it to say, that all systems, living or inanimate, regardless of form or function are ultimately made of atoms. Even energy, in all its forms and manifestations, by Einstein’s theory of special relativity (specifically by  $E = mc^2$ , where  $E$  is energy,  $m$  is mass of matter, and  $c$  is the speed of light), is equivalent to matter. This latter observation enlists electrical signals, electromagnetic waves, and other such seemingly non-material entities under the banner of “objects.”

Relationships constitute a very broad concept indeed, which fully merit their position as one of the two components of reality. Intuitively defined, a relationship is a “connection” of some sort between two entities. Such entities may themselves be objects or other relationships. This connection may be more formally defined as an overlap between two sets that serve as models for the two entities, as shown in Figure 1 below by the white or blank elements. Any entity such as object, system, concept, physical and abstract relationships, thoughts, and the like may be modeled by a set of attributes, the attributes being features, parts, behaviors or any other descriptive parameter

that can describe and specify the entity being modeled by the set. When two such sets overlap, that is, when there are some common attributes in the two sets, the overlap constitutes a relationship between the two. In other words, this overlap is a connection between the two entities, relating the two. Given the above model, we can also conclude and recognize that objects and relationships are interdependent and inherent: you cannot have one without the other.

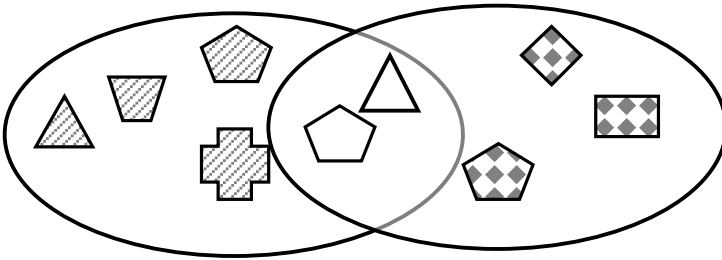


Figure 1: Relationships represented as the overlap of two sets.

As it turns out, relationships, or rather understanding them, play an essential role in intelligence. To begin with, relationships are of two types: material, physical, or observable relationships and abstract or rational ones. Material relationships are those which are observable via some sensory facilities such as vision or other types of sensors. For example, the relationship between the frame and the wheels of a bicycle is readily visible in that the frame is connected to the wheels and is supported by them. The defining property of a material relationship is that it is physical in nature and thus sensible or observable using some physical property, be the property geometric, chemical, mechanical, electrical, thermal, or the like. Other examples of physical/material relationships include those between leaves and a tree, riverbed and river, and the movements of clouds by wind.

Abstract or rational relationships, on the other hand, have no physical manifestation and are entirely intellectual in

essence. To illustrate, returning to our example for the distinction of science and rationality, a circle includes many material as well as abstract relationships. The uniformly curved contour of the perimeter of a physical circular object is a visible and material trait, while the relationship between its radius and its area is abstract ( $r^2$ ). Such abstract relationship is not visible; it is not sensible; it is not physically detectable by any means; it has no physical existence. It has only rational existence. That is, no arrangement of matter can manifest a rational relationship in and of itself without the use of rational faculty. Other examples of rational relationships include those embedded in geometric theories, the economic law of supply and demand, and the design of software.

However, the most essential distinction between a physical relationship and a rational one derives from what it means to be physical. Simply put, a physical entity is one that occupies space and is affected by time. Any and all physical entities, be they physical objects or physical relationships, take some space and age with time. Unlike physical relationships, rational relationships occupy no space and are unaffected by passage of time. The formula for the area of a circle is wholly independent of spatial dimensions and does not change or decay with the passage of time; it is today precisely what it was at the age of the dinosaurs. As such, rational relationships are outside the domain of the physical world as characterized by time and space.

Other phenomena are encountered in nature such as energy, force, process, and others. What about these phenomena, which are also encountered in the real world? Can these also be classified as either objects or relationships? Yes. Some of them like energy, are forms of matter as explained above and may thus be considered as objects, broadly defined. Other phenomena like force and process are relationships that result from the interactions of objects. For example, force exerted between two objects results from a difference in energy density levels (Joules of energy per gram of mass) of the two objects. For instance, the force of impact results from objects moving

at different speeds and thus having different kinetic energy density levels.

We have talked about the simple *components* of reality, namely, objects and relationships, but what about reality itself, its model? Equally simple, is the *model* of reality defined as an infinite *mathematical space* (as opposed to our physical three-dimensional space) of objects and relationships represented by a network graph with objects as vertices (circles) and relationships connecting them (lines), as shown in Figure 2.

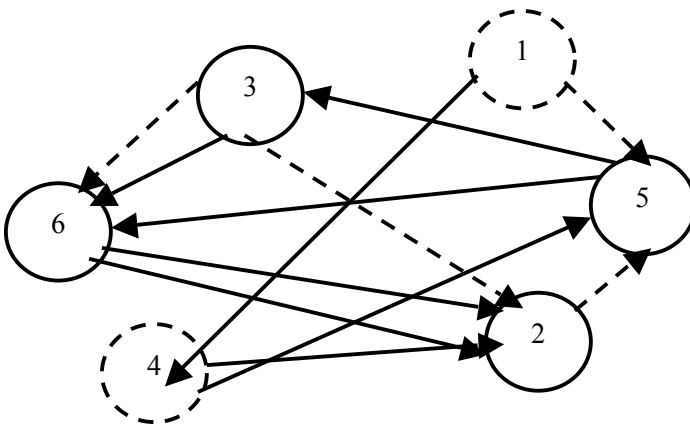


Figure 2: A model of reality: a network graph with objects as vertices and relationships as edges.

As indicated above, both the objects and the relationships may be either physical (shown as solid lines) or abstract (shown as dotted lines).

In this model, anything that exists, an animal, a system, various natural phenomena, atoms, man-made system like economic and legal system, and the like can also be represented as a subset of this space, namely, several objects with the relationships between them. This model has uncountably infinite objects and uncountably infinite relationships between each two objects. The details of these assertions are beyond the scope of this paper, however, recognizing that an object can be created from any combination of other objects, and

relationships are created based on any defined attribute of those objects, it should be apparent that the mathematical space used for modeling reality is infinite.

So, what does all this have to do with thinking and the human soul? Well, let's first continue with the meaning of thinking where we left off above, and search for our souls later.

Thinking is the *process* of traversal of this mathematical space via the relationship pathways and the tools provided by logic, while intelligence is the *ability* to traverse. Any example of common (or uncommon) thinking fits well with these definitions. For instance, *thinking* about navigating objects in a room while walking, an election process, steps in solving a problem, or designing a can opener, all involve traversing this space via various relevant relationships that we observe.

### A Model of the Brain

At the most basic level, we can model the brain simply as a system with inputs and outputs, as shown in Figure 3 below. Many systems, no matter how complex or from what field of study, are modeled this way because of its simplicity, accuracy, and clarity.

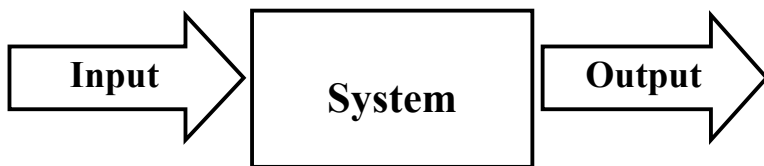


Figure 3: A model of systems also suitable as a basic model of the brain.

Let's apply this model to the brain in more specific terms. The central nervous system, the most important part of which is the brain, is an information processing system with three major *cognitive* functions: information collection, integration, and storage; information processing (thinking); and new



information production (discovery). Brain is also a controller of the body parts and internal systems, but this is not a cognitive function.

Brain's external behavior can be characterized as an input-process-output system, where the inputs are the information provided by the five senses, the process is the processing of information, and output is the behavior of the body and new knowledge.

The input to the brain includes the five senses: sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste, as schematically shown in Figure 4 below.



Figure 4: The five senses as inputs to the system of brain.

### Artificial Intelligence: A Few Notes

A common, but potentially misleading, definition of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is the ability to imitate human intelligence. AI has existed in various forms and incarnations since ancient times. The technological form of AI is only a few decades old. In the old times, AI was not known as “AI,” but rather as mythical creatures or wishful objects such as dragons, demons, mirrors, moving statues (in those days they were not called robots), crystal balls, and the like, which could mimic human intelligence in some fashion. Later as human knowledge and capabilities increased, various forms of mechanized intelligence started to emerge.

This brings us to the mid 20th century, really 1960's, when serious AI started with the invention and development of digital computers. Such wishful thinking, which was always "just 20 years away" peaked in the 1980's and 1990's, most notably in the U.S. and Japan, which had developed some of the most powerful supercomputers of the day, such as Cray1, Cray-2, Cray-X-MP, and Cray Y-MP in the U.S., and SX-3/44R and Hitachi SR2201 in Japan. These computers used multiple processors working in parallel to provide many Gigaflops and teraflops (billions or trillions of Floating Point Operations) per second.

Even though to this date computers have continued on their path of ever more processors and teraflops, towards the end of 1990's and early 2000's the wishful dreamers of the human-like artificial intelligence were rudely awakened by a gradual dose of reality. After about 40-50 years of thinking that true AI that could rival or surpass human intelligence was right around the corner, true general intelligence was not forthcoming. Sure enough, success abounded in limited cognitive domains such as chess playing software that defeated even the best of human chess masters; "expert systems," as domain-specific software are known, that could analyze seismic waveforms in oil and gas exploration; speech synthesizers and recognizers with 95% or more accuracy, and the like. But, general intelligence that works in sophisticated new fields, generates new and accurate theories about various phenomena, and displays common-sense reasoning, eluded such age-old AI dreams.

The modern technologically based AI banks on the idea that intelligence is the same as computation and merely having more and more processing power will ensure higher and higher levels of intelligence. Hence, the AI field views thinking purely as information processing. Thus, any system, live or inanimate, that has more processing power can be potentially more intelligent. Thus, the logical conclusion based on this assumption is that computers will inevitably surpass human

intelligence when they amass sufficient processing power. Well, this assumption is a serious and largely unrecognized flaw.

As we shall see later, there is more to general intelligence than processing power or computation. It will require visibility of abstract relationships, and less obviously, life and emotions. However, this paper is more focused on the ability to see abstract relationships than the life and emotional aspects.

### **Analogy and Cognition: Thinking Model Extended**

We started by defining thinking as tracking reality in our minds modeled as traversing the graph in the reality object-relationship space model. But there are other important aspects to thinking within this model. One of the most important aspects of this model is how the traversal is performed. The traversal does not simply start at point A and continue to another point B within the graph. Multiple sub-graphs (subsets in the reality space model) may be traversed in the process of one thought. And these sub-graphs may not be directly connected or adjacent. But how these sub-graphs *are* connected is through analogy. Let's see how.

Analogy plays a central role in abstract thought, as we will see in Part II below. For now, let's see precisely what analogy means and how it is related to the reality space model. At a basic level, analogy is a recognition of abstract similarity (physical or tangible similarity is not analogy) and means applying a particular relationship from one context to another unrelated context. For example, we may analogize the legs on a horse to the wheels on a car. Even though the legs of the horse have no physical similarity (or connection) to the wheels of a car, in substance or in action, but they perform at least some of the same functions, namely, supporting the body and providing motion. hence we see and can apply the same relationship between a horse and its legs to a car and its wheels. However, analogy goes a lot further than this simple I.Q. (Intelligent Quotient) test question.

More precisely, analogy is about categorization. Categorization may seem like a curious concept to occupy such an esteemed position in relation to intelligence. But, what is even more curious is that categorization actually defines a very important type of relationship in the model of reality. To see why this is, we need to first take an excursion from this thread of thought and then come back to it, as we often do.

### *Trees of Reality*

This can be a rather complicated excursion if we get into too much detail, so we will suffice with the general concept. In the object-relationship space model of reality, a graph was described in which objects were connected to each other via relationships. Going one step further, we recognize that there are different kinds of relationships in this model. In a sense we can say those lines representing relationships in the reality model of Figure 2, are not just lines. Each one may have an internal structure of its own, like a sky scraper that from far away may look like a thick line, but up close it has additional features. Two of the most important and general kinds of relationships are best represented by the *System* and *Type* Trees described below.

A very prominent and invariable truth is that the world of creation is characterized by limits. If there were no limits, quite literally nothing could be distinguished from another, nothing could be quantified. Indeed, without limits it would not even be possible to define anything, because defining something requires identifying its boundaries. Given this truth, anything can be considered a system having a number of components, while every component itself may be regarded as a system having its own components, and every system may be regarded as a component in a bigger system. This view logically follows from the concept of limits because a system is a set of entities with a boundary around them and so, everything with a boundary qualifies as a system, and that means *everything*.

A couple of illustrative examples should convince the reader that this system-oriented view is valid and accurate about all things, processes, and phenomena. Consider an object, any object, such as house. It is immediately obvious that a house is composed of rooms as its components, while a room itself is a system with components of its own such as its walls, and the walls are systems in their own rights having bricks as their components, and so on. In the other direction, a house is a component of a system of neighborhood, and the system of neighborhood is itself a component of a system of city, and so on. As another, wholly different kind of example, take a paragraph in a book. It is a system the components of which are the sentences. In turn, the sentences are each a system with words as their components, and the words have letters as their components, and so on. Again, in the other direction, a paragraph may be component in a system of a page, while a page is a component in a chapter, and so on. This concept is equally applicable to any processes the steps of which are its components, and the process itself is but a step in a bigger process. These very different examples illustrate the absolutely general reach and applicability of system structure.

This system structure aspect of reality is illustrated in Figure 5, below with the aid of the System Tree. The System Tree is an upside-down (with root at the top) and Specific-To-General (STG) tree, where its root represents something specific, and as we traverse down the tree towards its leaves, the components become progressively more generic and general. For example, a specific house is distinguished from other houses, but a brick in the wall is the same as any other brick in any other wall. The System Tree is applicable to processes as well, where each process has steps of its own and the whole process may be a step in a bigger process.

Hence, any entity in the world can be represented by a System Tree, which is not unique, incidentally. Many System Trees may be constructed for the same entity depending on what we want to model and what boundaries or aspect of the

entity we are interested in. For example, a car is a component in an industrial system as well as an economic system. Hence a car can be a component in two different system. Actually, any object is a member of infinitely many systems.

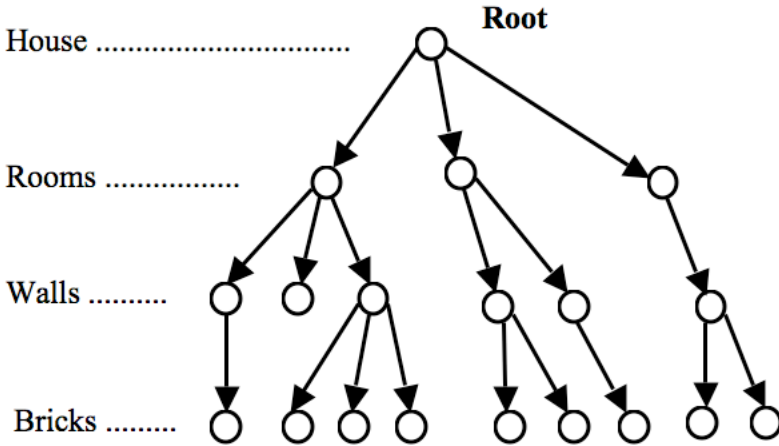


Figure 5: The System Tree - Specific To General (STG)

Just like any entity can be represented by a System Tree, it can also be represented by a Type Tree, simultaneously. But, what is a Type Tree and why is it as general as a System Tree? A Type Tree may be represented by another upside-down tree, this time, General-To-Specific (GTS; root is most general).

Consider a set of properties that define a *type*. It doesn't matter what we call the type, it is the set of properties that matter. Then any other entity that includes the same set of properties belongs to that type. When an entity has the same set of properties plus additional properties, then that entity is of that type, but a more specific version of it. Since *every* entity has some set of properties, then every entity has some type (or is of some type). This concept may be a bit abstract. So, again, we use a couple of examples to illustrate the concept and also show its absolute applicability.

As a first illustration, consider our favorite example, a house. With reference to Figure 6, below, a Structure, which

has some properties such as being rigid, being free-standing, and having a fixed relationship between its parts, is a root type, in this example. Traversing down from the root, we encounter a Building type, which is still a structure with all the properties of a Structure type, but with some added properties such as some facilities for human use and interaction like doors, stairs, lighting, etc. This makes a Building type just a more specific version of a Structure type. Moving further down, we get to a Residential Building type, which is still a more specific Building type and a Structure type, again, with some added properties like having facilities for human habitation, such as a kitchen, a bathroom, heating, etc. And finally a House type is a Residential Building type, a Building type, and a Structure type, albeit, a more specific version of them. Traversing the tree from the root upwards, we observe that a structure can itself be part of a more general type, such as Inanimate Objects type.

For our second illustration, we revert to our literary example. A *Paragraph* can be a root type in some defined Type Tree. An *English Paragraph*, is a more specific version of a Paragraph type with the added property of being in English language, and an *English Introduction Paragraph* is still a more specific type of the above types.

So, it is clear that because every entity has a set of properties, every entity defines a type and by adding or subtracting properties from the set we arrive at more specific or more general versions of the same type. And again, like the System Tree, the Type Tree is not unique and an entity can be part of infinitely many Type Trees depending on what properties we focus on.

Another term for type is *category*, which sometimes has more familiar connotations for our purposes. A rather subtle question that arises is the difference between the *mental act* of categorization of various phenomena based on their abstract properties and the similar *physical effects* those properties. For example, a human may mentally categorize predators, such as

wolves and lions, according to their territorial and pack behaviors. However, a prey animal, such as an antelope, is *affected* by these behaviors without having to understand or mentally categorize them in an abstract manner. Recognizing this distinction is important, lest we forget the abstract nature of categorization.

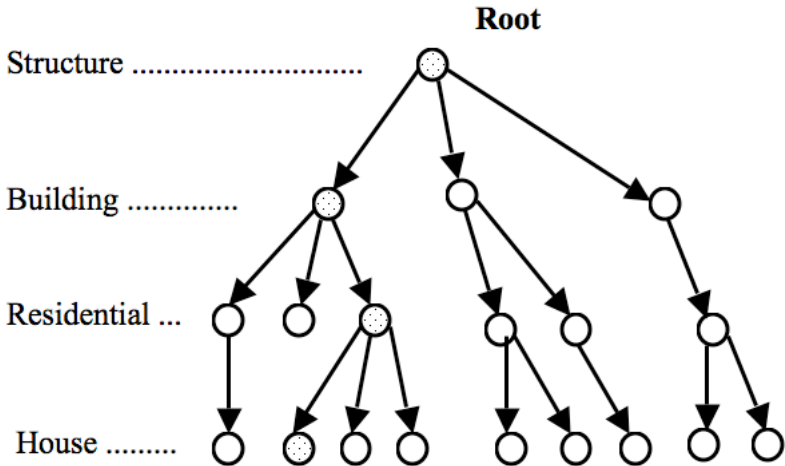


Figure 6: The Type Tree - General To Specific To (GTS)

The categorization or classification in the Type Tree is done based on one or a combination of several parameters. This means for a given parameter, each discrete value can result in a new sub-category. For example, when categorizing animals, if the parameter is habitat, then each different type of habitat results in a different category of animals. This means the category of “sea animals” will include whale (mammal), tuna (fish) and octopus (invertebrate), among others. But if the parameter is being warm- or cold-blooded, then the category of “warm-blooded animals” will include whale and pigeon, among others. This parameter(s) is called a basis. So, different basis result in different categorizations of the same objects or concepts.

Now, let’s go back to the relationship between thinking and categorization. When we think about something we actually



think about its properties, which determine its form, behavior, interactions with other things, reaction to various elements, and anything else we want to discuss about that thing. But since properties also define types or categories of things, inevitably we categorize things that we think about, whether implicitly or explicitly. As you might remember, analogy is all about abstract similarity. So, analogy can be expressed in terms of the Type Tree. By definition, two entities that belong to the same category (or Type Tree) share some properties or characteristics. As properties can be highly abstract, so can types. For example, the category of “hard” can include entities as diverse as hammer, water (as in hard water), exam, circumstances, direction (as in making a hard right turn) and many others. Note that none of these entities have any physical or apparent relationship to each other, yet they all belong to the same abstract type of “hard.” As such, we can define a Type Tree with the root being the most general understanding of “hard” (say, with the abstract property of having great influence on other things) and the other lower level nodes become progressively more specific types of “hard.”

An important result of categorization is that when two entities are determined to belong to the same category, then the known properties of one entity suddenly becomes applicable to the other one, which might hitherto have been unknown. For example, many geometric properties of circles belong to the same category as properties of electrical signals (such as frequency, phase angles, trigonometric relationships, and the like), while the shape “circle” has very little to do with the physical phenomenon of “electricity”, outside of their rational or abstract relationships. As such, the geometric properties of a circle are suddenly seen to be applicable to the analysis of electrical signals (or other types of signals like optical ones). This realization greatly facilitates, nay, makes possible, the analysis of signal processing, without which our understanding and application of electrical signals would only be primitive and limited to trivial outward observations.

Categorization is not a mere cognitive tool or trick to make our job of thinking easier. Abstract thought is all but impossible without the use of categorization of everything that we encounter. We use existing categories or modify them or create new ones all the time and then catalog everything accordingly, so, we know what to do with them based on the category they are in. Otherwise, we would have to reinvent every thought every time which, would bring our thoughts, and everything that depends on our thoughts, such as new insights, understandings, theories, discoveries, inventions, etc., to a grinding halt. An equally important function of categories is that they help us filter out things that do not belong to a current category of interest and focus on the task at hand. This is not a trivial benefit given the massive amounts of irrelevant information in our environment that are always at ready to act as noise to the information of interest.

An interesting thing about categories is that all basic categories originate from tangible things because the origin of our knowledge and our initial experience with a particular category starts with our senses. The reason for this origin is that we generalize and build categories starting from the tangible, specific and simple, leading up to the more abstract, general and complex. This observation is in accord with Abdu'l-Bahá's elucidation that: "*A thing cannot be grasped by the intelligence except when it is clothed in an intelligible form; otherwise, it is but an effort of the imagination.*" [SAQ 115]

Another confirmation of the fundamental importance of categorization in cognition and thinking has surfaced recently in a book named *Surfaces and Essences*, by authors and professors Douglas Hofstadter and Emmanuel Sander. In this book, Hofstadter and Sander spend considerable time to lay out a foundation for their thesis. They spend the rest of the book to go through a great deal of detail about the many facets of categorization in the context of human thought.<sup>3</sup> More specifically, Hofstadter and Sander start out by characterization of "Analogy as the Core of Cognition."<sup>4</sup> Then,

they proceed to lay down the foundations for their thesis by regarding “Categorization and Analogy-making as the Roots of Thinking.”<sup>5</sup> Interestingly enough, they also use simple drawings, similar to the Type Tree described above, to depict some of these concepts.<sup>6</sup>

And so, our enhanced model of thinking includes not only traversing the object-relationship reality space, but also making our traversal more comprehensive and faster using the power of analogy to connect different subsets of this space together.

## **PART - II: Proof of The Existence of Soul**

We have established some important foundational concepts. Now is time to apply these concepts to prove the existence and immortality of human soul. In this part, we will further complete our model of reality with additional structural refinements as explained by Abdu'l-Bahá. We will also briefly review some of the proofs of the existence of soul by Abdu'l-Bahá. Next, our brain model is upgraded to allow for spiritual activities such as abstract relationship recognition. However, all these will distinguish humans from animals for most part, but what about computers? To answer this question, we will extend our reasoning to show that machines are also excluded from the domain of general intelligence and rational relationships. Finally, we conclude that the human soul is immortal.

### **Unity of Existence and the four Kingdoms**

An ancient philosophical theme is unity. Indeed, even without a precise definition, we can see some form of unity underlying all things in one way or another. A rather practical definition of unity among a number of seemingly diverse things is broad commonality. In that commonality, these diverse things are united. Imagine all the diverse cars in the world which, are all united by sharing the common characteristics of all cars. Without delving too deeply into this concept, as it is

not the subject of our discussion here, let's examine the greatest unity of all: the unity of existence.

*... this mineral belongs to the mineral kingdom; however far it may rise, it can never comprehend the power of growth. The plants, the trees, whatever progress they may make, cannot conceive of the power of sight or the powers of the other senses; and the animal cannot imagine the condition of man -- that is to say, his spiritual powers. [SAQ 221]*

In several passages in his writings and utterances, including the above, Abdu'l-Bahá divides the world into four concentric "kingdoms" or realms. These kingdoms include the Mineral Kingdom, the Plant Kingdom, the Animal Kingdom, and the Human Kingdom, each with its own special power. The power of the Mineral Kingdom is its physical strength, the power of the Plant Kingdom is growth, the power of Animal Kingdom is senses and integration of information from the senses, and the power of the Human Kingdom is general intelligence.

These kingdoms are further arranged in order from lowest to highest forms and capabilities, where each higher kingdom has the powers of all the lower ones and comprehend them, but not vice versa. So, for example, the Animal Kingdom has the physical strength of minerals and the growth power of plants in addition to its own power of senses and information processing. This is the "concentric" part of these kingdoms, diagrammatically shown below in Figure 8.

We might ask: "what is the basis of this categorization?" At least one parameter in its basis is the strategy or method of survival. Briefly, minerals defend their survival by their physical strength of material, that is, they resist deformation. Their form defines what they are and in a sense is their "life" (a crushed tin box is a dead box). Once a mineral entity loses its form, there is no going back, on its own, that is. We know this because any physical change in an object requires energy. That

is precisely how much the object is resisting its deformation, or “death.” For the plants, the survival strategy includes the physical strength of minerals plus the power of growth, which mends them, to some extent, if damage occurs. And they do this on their own. For animals, the survival strategy includes the minerals’ and the plants’ plus remote sensing and central nervous system for sensory information integration. So, animals can detect danger before it even gets physically close to them. And they also learn from experience. Humans have all these lower survival strategies plus a rational mind that can see “invisible” dangers, not picked up by any physical sense, but by rational reasoning, such as predicting what happens to crops six months later if we have drought today.

Why is this classification of the world and its contents into these four kingdoms significant? For one thing, this structure helps us organize the world into a more understandable and manageable place, at least information-wise. However, for our purposes, this classification gives us an important insight, namely, that all these realms are part of a single unified world, not a fragmented random one. The denizens of each of these kingdoms, however, can only interact and “see” that portion or subset of the whole world that its kingdom is equipped to interact with. For example, a plant can only interact with the subset of the world that plants utilize for growth such as soil, water, sunshine, breeze, and the like. An animal can interact with all these elements in addition to what it can sense via any of its senses. To a flower a car passing by has no existence. The flower is absolutely incapable of seeing or sensing the existence of the car in any shape, way, or form. A dog however, can see, hear, and smell the car from a distance and can further remember and process the information so collected by its sense, for example, recognizing its master’s car when coming home. Hence, even though the whole world exists out there, each creature can only see or comprehend the subset it can interact with. The realization that creatures in each kingdom have

visibility to only a limited subset of the universe, is critical to understanding the spiritual realm, as we shall see later.

For the sake of consistency and completeness, the unity of the world is logically not limited to our physical universe. If there are other universes, as the multi-verse theory suggests, all these universes are still part of one unified *existence*, defined as the realm that contains anything that exists including any number of universes, their laws, and their creatures.

### A Property of Soul: Intelligence

In many of his tablets and utterances Abdu'l-Bahá explains that the progress of man is because of his spiritual powers. For example, the following passage makes this point clear.

*Though man has powers and outer senses in common with the animal, yet an extraordinary power exists in him of which the animal is bereft. The sciences, arts, inventions, trades, and discoveries of realities, are the results of this spiritual power. This is a power which encompasses all things, comprehends their realities, discovers all the hidden mysteries of beings, and through this knowledge controls them: it even perceives things which do not exist outwardly; that is to say, intellectual realities which are not sensible, and which have no outward existence, because they are invisible.*

He continues:

*Moreover, these existing sciences, arts, laws, and endless inventions of man at one time were invisible, mysterious, and hidden secrets; it is only the all-encompassing human power which has discovered and brought them out from the plane of the invisible to the plane of the visible. [SAQ 186]*

Even more explicitly, Abdu'l-Bahá declares that intelligence (“mental faculties”) is a direct emanation of the human soul: “*Now concerning mental faculties, they are in truth of the inherent properties of the soul, even as the radiation of light is the essential property of the sun.*”<sup>7</sup>

These passages, especially the highlighted segments, directly guide our way to a precise proof of the existence of soul and intelligence as one its prominent properties. Before we embark on the main proof, however, let’s review some of Abdu'l-Bahá’s proofs and elucidations regarding the human soul. These are not always proofs, *per se*, but rather guiding principles and comments that show the way to those who want to research and gain a deeper understanding of his guidance.

### Abdu'l-Bahá’s Proofs and Commentaries on Existence of Soul: A Brief Survey

Bahá’u’lláh and Abdu'l-Bahá, in numerous tablets, have explained the existence and character of the human soul, to the extent possible to understand such matters in the physical realm. One of Abdu'l-Bahá’s proofs that man is different from animal, and the source of the main principle for this paper, is the ability of man to perceive rational relationships while animals are limited to sensed relationships, as explained in the quote above and further elaborated in the quote below:

*The animal cannot realize the intelligence of a human being, he only knows that which is perceived by his animal senses, he cannot imagine anything in the abstract. An animal could not learn that the world is round, that the earth revolves round the sun, or the construction of the electric telegraph.* [PT 11]

In another tablet, Abdu'l-Bahá draws our attention to the difference between the mind and the soul in the context of sleep and dream. He explains that:

*The mind is circumscribed, the soul limitless. It is by the aid of such senses as those of sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch, that the mind comprehendeth, whereas the soul is free from all agencies. The soul as thou observest, whether it be in sleep or waking, is in motion and ever active. Possibly it may, whilst in a dream, unravel an intricate problem, incapable of solution in the waking state.*<sup>8</sup>

Some may try to superficially dismiss these explanations by asserting that brain processes associated with cognition can continue during sleep, and there is no reason to appeal to the existence of soul, however, as we'll see, cognition is not just a matter of information processing.

In still another proof, Abdu'l-Bahá explains that the human soul is not dependent on the health of the body, unlike the human mind, which is the functional product of the brain:

*Consider how the human intellect develops and weakens, and may at times come to naught, whereas the soul changeth not. For the mind to manifest itself, the human body must be whole; and a sound mind cannot be but in a sound body, whereas the soul dependeth not upon the body.*<sup>9</sup>

In numerous tablets, Bahá'u'lláh likens the human soul to a bird and his body to a cage: “*from thy mortal cage wing thy flight unto the paradise of the Placeless*” [HW 36]. He similarly likens the human soul to light and his body to a lamp: “*Thou art My lamp and My light is in thee*” [HW 6]. Bahá'u'lláh uses these metaphors, among others, to reveal and emphasize the independence of the soul from the body.



## The Proof: Why Physical Systems Cannot Understand Rational Relationships

At this point, we have spend quite a bit of time defining, developing, and polishing different pieces of the proof. These pieces form a rather extensive list including our part scientific - part rational methodology; the fact that science is not the only or even the main analytical attraction in town; the primacy of logic; a model of reality, its four kingdoms, and important relationships represented by System and Type Trees; definition of physical and rational relationships as overlap between sets of entities; a model of thinking based on the model of reality; definition of intelligence as the ability to think in this model; and general intelligence as (a yet-to-be-proven) property of soul. Now is the time to put these pieces together.

The gist of the proof, the basic thesis is that a physical system, any physical system, brain and computer included, cannot understand a rational relationships because they have no physical existence. Let's now prove this thesis.

We defined a relationship between two entities as a connection (technically, an overlap) between two sets representing the two entities. Hence, for a relationship between two entities to exist, a connection must exist. Understanding something requires having a connection with that something first. If there is no connection there can be no understanding. Let's put this in more concrete terms. All physical relationships are between physical objects. So, a physical system can make a connection with such physical objects and thus, process the information so obtained. But what if the relationship is rational and not physical? Remember that rational relationships have no physical existence because they are outside the domain of time and space, which chiefly characterize the physical world. As explained earlier in Part I, a physical relationship, such as the relationship between a wall and a door in a building, requires space and changes with passage of time. But a rational relationship, such as the formula for the calculation of the area

of a rectangle (area = long side x short side) has no need for space to exist and is not altered or otherwise affected by the passage of time. Hence, it is fundamentally outside the domain of physical existence. In contrast a physical system, by definition, is bound within time and space and is in the physical realm. But, by definition, the realms inside and outside the physical domain are mutually exclusive, have no overlap and no connection. Therefore, a physical system, bound in the physical realm, cannot detect, understand, or process a rational relationship which lies outside the physical realm. In set theory jargon, a set and what lies outside the set (called its complement) have no overlap. A metaphor may serve to crystallize the concept: it is like trying to catch the wind in a net. Wind has no solid body to be caught in the net. In a way it has little material overlap or connection with the net. That's why the net and the wind cannot make effective contact.

Well, this all sounds very interesting, but then how is it that we as humans understand all these rational relationships with our brains quite well, seeing and processing them by the thousands every day? The answer is we don't, not with our brains. The only way we could possibly see and understand any rational and abstract relationships is with a system in the same domain as the rational relationships. We can call this realm the spiritual realm and the system for understanding them the spirit or the soul.

Animals, not being equipped with a spiritual system or soul, can see the physical relationships and aspects in an experience, but not its rational aspects. A chimpanzee can see a circle, can match the shape to another round object, can distinguish a circle from a triangle, because these are all physical relationships and thus, sensible. But it cannot see or understand the concept of multiplication or area calculation. Such concepts and relationships are completely and literally invisible, nay, non-existent to it. Like the net, its brain cannot catch the rational wind. It has no connection with it.

This concludes the core of our proof, but it is not all. We still have to answer other important questions, such as how is this spiritual system in communication with us? If it is in a different realm, then how can we have a connection with it? Where is the overlap? How can our physical brain memory retain the rational relationships and our understanding of them? This is not an exhaustive list of questions and issues, but it is a good start.

### **Brain Model Extended**

Since the above questions revolve around the role of the brain in cognition, the role of the brain seems like a good place to continue with this discussion. With the above arguments and insights regarding the requirements for seeing and understanding rational relationships, we can now extend the brain model described above with respect to Figure 4.

Consistent with the model presented in Figure 4, we can extend the power and vision of the brain, which is a physical system, to see and understand rational relationships. If we model the soul as a rational sense, a true sixth sense that detects rational relationships and relay it to the brain, much the same way the eye detects visual information and the ear detects sound signals, then we have a consistent model that accounts for human brain's capacity to understand rational relationship. This relationship between the soul and the brain is shown schematically in Figure 7 as a little ghost, since physical attributes, such as shape, cannot be associated with the soul. Hence, in this model, the brain, despite being a physical system, is given the capacity, through the instrumentality of the soul, to see the whole of existence not just what is visible at the level of the animal kingdom.

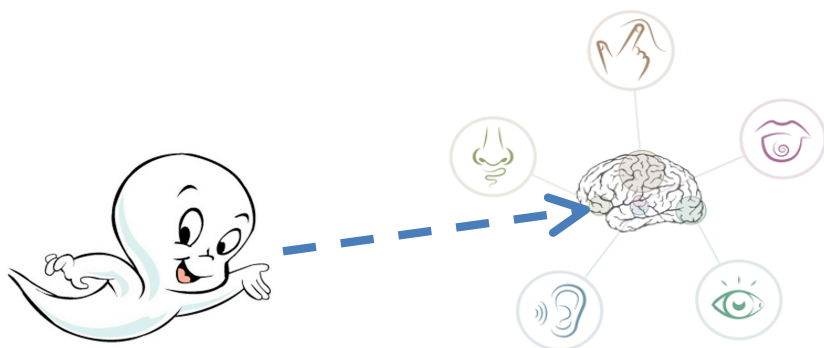


Figure 7: Brain extension: six senses as inputs to the system of brain.

This model explains the external operation of the brain system as a whole. However, it still doesn't seem to explain how the brain can be in contact with this spiritual sense, the soul, the existence of which is limited to the spiritual or non-physical realm.

To explain the connection between the brain and the soul, let's revisit the model of reality and remodel it a little.

### Model of Reality: New and Improved

Like the updated model of the brain, the model of reality is augmented with a new set of relationships superimposed on the original ones shown in Figure 2. The model of Figure 2 showed the generic set of relationships between all entities in the world. The System and Type Trees of Figures 5 and 6 introduced new relationships that classified the generic ones. In other words, some of the relationships shown generically in Figure 2 as lines have the additional properties of the System and Type Trees. Continuing with this process of refinement and augmentation, Figure 8 below adds another layer of properties and attributes to the generic relationships. That means while some objects in the model of Figure 2 may be related to one another in particular ways, such as by color or shape, they can further be related to each other by being members of one of the four

kingdoms of Mineral, Plant, Animal, and Human kingdoms, as discussed earlier.

In short, each of the augmentations made to the basic model of reality adds some attributes and refinements rather than changing it altogether. This is like adding layers of new ideas and relationships to the model of reality. But, how does this new model answer our questions regarding the connection between the soul and the brain?

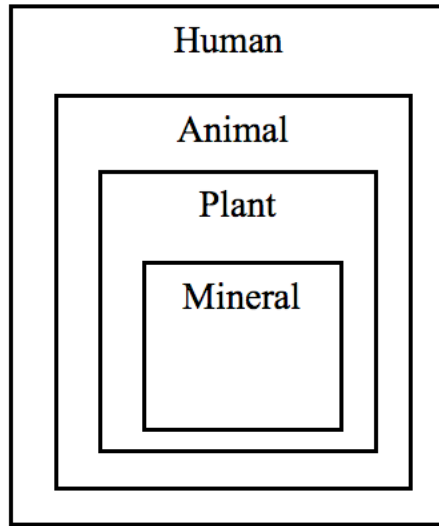


Figure 8: An aspect of the model of reality augmented with the four Kingdoms.

Even though each kingdom is separated from others, but at its boundary the kingdom touches the adjacent ones. This is called an interface. An interface between two domains is a gateway for communicating information (which may be embedded in energy or material such as heat, fluids, chemicals, etc.) between the two without mixing the domains. The concept of an interface is well-known in computers, biology, and other technical circles. As an example, consider the boundary between minerals and plants. A handful of soil is a member of the Mineral Kingdom while a rose bush is a member of the Plant Kingdom. There is no mixing of the two, however, they do have

an interface. The rose bush roots absorb water and minerals from the soil, which are then integrated with the plant and become part of that kingdom. At the same time the physical presence, such as the size and weight of the plant, is “sensed” or “seen” by the soil without seeing any more of the Plant Kingdom. Thus, there is some form of information exchange between these two kingdoms at the interface.

Applying the interface concept to the boundary between the Human Kingdom (where our brain resides) and the spiritual realm (where the soul resides) can explain how the soul can interface with our brain. The exact nature of this interface is transcendental, by definition, and is largely unknowable because one side of this interface, namely the soul, is invisible in our physical world. However, once our soul sees or detects a rational relationship and relays it across this interface to our brain, then the rational relationship becomes just another piece of information that can be recorded in our memory like the information collected by any other physical sense, such as our eyes and ears. This way, the rational knowledge from the invisible spiritual realm is transmitted to the physical realm.

At this point, it bears emphasis that the augmented model of reality of Figure 8 shows a unified existence and the rational relationships seen by the soul are merely the most general and at the highest level of this existence. Thus, it is not unreal for such spiritually based rational relationships to be transferred to a lower kingdom in some form, as they are all part of the same existence.

### **Can Machines “Think?”**

As much as we may wish, this is not the end of this journey. So far, we have shown that no physical system can possess general intelligence and understand rational relationships, thus, necessitating the existence of a non-physical soul. This theory shows the difference between humans and animals. However, a very important question of modern origins remain: if no

physical system can detect and process rational relationships, then how do computers do it?

Clearly, computers can and do process abstract and rational relationships every day, doing it even as this paper is being written on a modern word processor. What gives? Humans do!

To understand how computers do not violate the requirement that a non-physical system must understand rational relationships, and are not an exception to this rule, we have to go back to the critical role of analogy and categorization in cognition, discussed in Part I. It is important to keep in mind that the core logical reason that animals or computers cannot see nor understand rational relationships is still the fact that rational relationships are outside the bounds of time and space and literally do not exist in the physical realm, and hence, have no connection with animals or computers, as discussed above in detail. But we still need to explain the questions posed above with respect to computer processing of rational relationships.

The key to recognizing that computers do not understand rational relationships any more than a doorstop, is realizing the difference between *understanding* and *representation*. Representation of information basically entails the encoding of information in a symbolic form. For example, computer languages represent information in binary format (a string of 0's and 1's, such as  $2 = 010$ , and  $5 = 101$ ), and natural languages, like English and Japanese, represent information using alphabet, logograms, or other symbolic forms. Representation in and of itself does not convey semantics or meaning. A computer no more understands its program than a book understands its contents. Representation is merely an assignment of a symbol to an object or an action. In mathematics, this is called a *mapping*. If the object or action is not understood in the first place, then merely mapping it to a different symbol does not bring about its comprehension. If

one doesn't know what *osmosis* is, then translating it to a different language does not alter his lack of knowledge.

Computers can process abstract information and relationships, in the form of formulas, algorithms, computer languages, and other computing constructs because humans have already encoded these rational relationships in those formulas, algorithms, and languages. In other words, humans already have understood the relationships and have merely encoded them into the computing environment in one form or another as needed. Even computer-based "expert systems," software that are expert in a particular domain such as seismic signal analysis, financial data analysis, voice recognition, game playing, and the like, depend on humans. All such expert systems depend on their internal programming and semantic data files, which are created by humans who encode the necessary abstract relationships. That's why computers with learning algorithms and software are limited in their learning to their specific domains initially encoded by humans. They cannot break out into other unrelated domains and apply what they learn. Many expert systems learn and improve over time. For example, a voice recognition system can learn to understand a new human accent not specifically programmed before. But they are limited in their learning and application to human speech variations, not stock market variations. Such learning can be transferred to other domains but only by human mediators who adapt them.

But, what does it mean to understand? Understanding complex relationships is so second nature to humans that we forget it is more than mere perception or sensing of an object or action. Perhaps it is easier to start with an example. We learn the concept, dynamics, and value of teamwork when we play soccer. But we only truly understand it when we can apply the same concepts and dynamics in a project or in our jobs, which are totally unrelated in practice and purpose to playing soccer.



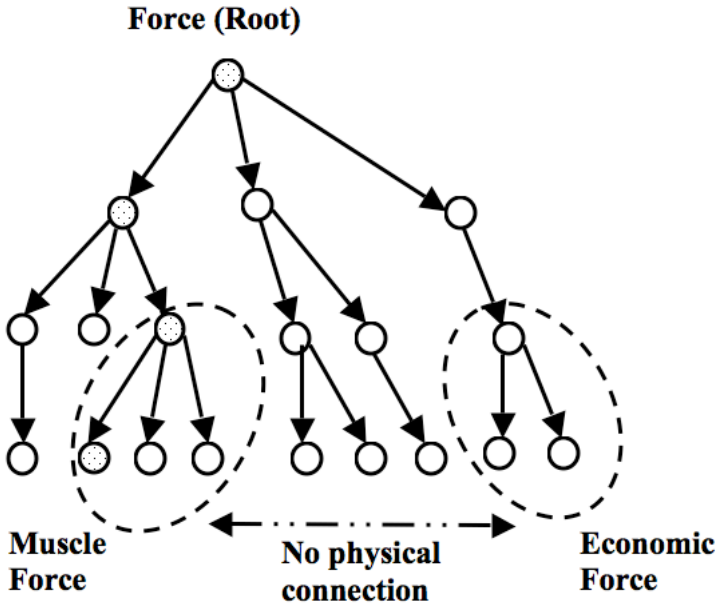


Figure 9: A force Type Tree with disjoint sub-types connected only through abstract relationships.

More formally, understanding means the ability to apply relationships learned from a source sub-type (or sub-category) in a Type Tree (or general category) to a target sub-type that has no physical connection to or relationship with the source sub-type. This definition is less obscure and esoteric than it appears. Once we understand what it means then we recognize how ubiquitous and common it actually is in everyday life.

Figure 9, above, depicts the concept of understanding using another example. The Type Tree shown is for the concept of abstract force and its many incarnations placed in the category of *force*. If we define the root type as the most abstract concept of force having the attributes of magnitude (or quantity), direction, and ability to effect change, then all other sub-categories or sub-types of force include these three attributes plus additional ones. For example, the force of gravity has a magnitude (weight), a direction (downwards or towards earth), and the ability to change things (break a falling

china cup). The force of gravity has the additional attribute of being a function of the mass of the earth and the bodies close to it in a way that the force of a spring isn't. In the example Type Tree of Figure 9, one sub-category of force is muscle force, which is essentially created by molecular action of proteins that chemically combine to shorten the physical length of muscle fibers, thus contracting them. This is a physical force that everybody is familiar with its use. Another sub-type, totally and entirely different in apparent nature and having no relation to muscle force whatsoever, is the economic force. Yet, everybody recognizes the metaphor of economic "force" and its validity instantly and effortlessly. This is because we recognize that economic force has the three attributes of the abstract force (magnitude, direction, ability to effect change) plus additional attributes specific to the economic force, such as the many financial concepts like interest rate and marginal cost.

We say we understand the concept of force because we can successfully apply it to many physically disjoint and unrelated applications, such as the economic force. This is not the case for computers. Even if computers were attached to sensors like cameras and networked to all databases in the world with unimaginable amounts of data, they would fail in understanding anything. As a matter of fact, computers today do have access to such sensors and data, but they only operate in the domains in which they were designed to operate. They simply are not equipped to and cannot bridge the rational gap. And of course, all the data in various databases have been designed and the knowledge contained in them have been encoded by humans. We must bear in mind that the construction of a Type Tree, which was used to explain the meaning of *understanding*, is also an abstract concept that only humans can do. We can enlist the help of computers in this respect, but only if we encode the abstract concepts for them.

Understanding is relative. We can understand things in degrees and in all likelihood there is no end to the depth of

understanding of something because the Type Tree can have an arbitrary depth and breadth. Hence, we can apply our understanding to farther and farther regions of the tree, deepening our understanding. For example, the concept of force may be applied to a new and different context with its own additional characteristics, such as power of faith, psychological force, political force, and the like, each providing a deeper understanding of the concept of force. Relativity of understanding, however, does not change its nature, namely that it is achieved through seeing and traversing the rational relationships in the model of reality. It is like crossing vast divides between different concepts in the physical world using the invisible bridges of rational and abstract relationships. These invisible bridges are only visible to the human soul, not computers or animals.

The inability of computers to see rational relationships and understand them really extends much further and deeper than the analytical picture presented above implies. However, examining this extension is beyond the scope of this paper save a brief mention. With reference to Figure 8, the kingdoms that define the basic categories of creation, computers belong to the Mineral Kingdom, and are literally inferior to and dumber than a mosquito, let alone a human. Even more specifically, emotions, which are fundamental properties of living organisms, play an integral role in intelligence. Emotions create purpose in life, human or animal, and drive the search for new knowledge or new experience. Without emotions, one could ask “what is the *motivation* for seeking new knowledge?” In the absence of motivation, the very quest and search for knowledge, even if programmed in a computer to automatically and perpetually perform, reduces to a mindless, purposeless, and mechanical process of information acquisition and any innate value or meaning assignable to knowledge is stripped away. This mechanical process would be like one of those old toy cars that blindly moved until it hit an object, like a table leg, and then backed up and turned and went in another

direction until it hit another object. At the end, nothing is achieved and no more meaning can be assigned to this search for knowledge than to the tumbling of an uprooted weed randomly driven by the desert wind.

But the answer to the question in the header of this section, “can machines think?” is technically “yes.” This is because we defined thinking as the process of traversing the graph in the space model of reality (Figure 2) and machines can do that, but only with respect to the physical relationships, not the rational ones. For example a computer connected to a camera can detect an image and track it across the screen or recognize it as a particular object, a human face, a fingerprint, and the like. All of these are based on physical data or abstract information encoded by humans. So, machines can “think” in a mechanical sense (i.e., no emotional impetus or meaning) and within the bounded subset of reality limited to physical relationships only.

## Immortality of the Soul

The existence of the soul is one question, and its immortality another. Abdu'l-Bahá treats the subject of the human soul in *Some Answered Questions* the same way. He first proves its existence and then explains its immortality. He states: “*Having shown that the spirit of man exists, we must prove its immortality.*” [SAQ 223]

Abdu'l-Bahá uses a number of proofs of immortality of soul, some of which are based on the same concepts he uses to prove its existence, such as independence of human spirit from his physical body and its ailments, revelations during sleep, its influence in this world after death, and others. [SAQ 223-229] Furthermore, Abdu'l-Bahá explains:

*The whole physical creation is perishable. These material bodies are composed of atoms; when these atoms begin to separate decomposition sets in, then comes what we call death. This composition of atoms, which constitutes*

*the body or mortal element of any created being, is temporary. When the power of attraction, which holds these atoms together, is withdrawn, the body, as such, ceases to exist.*

*With the soul it is different. The soul is not a combination of elements, it is not composed of many atoms, it is of one indivisible substance and therefore eternal. It is entirely out of the order of the physical creation; it is immortal!* [PT 89]

In this passage Abdu'l-Bahá explains that the soul is immortal because death is nothing but decomposition and the soul is not composed of anything and is, therefore, immortal.

In the context of this paper, we present a proof of the immortality of the soul, which is related but not identical to Abdu'l-Bahá's explanations. In this context, the rational relationships were defined as being in the spiritual domain and as being sensible by the soul because it is in the same domain. The rational relationships were also defined as not being bound by time and space, which implies that the spiritual realm and the soul are also not so bound.

Now, what does immortality mean? Immortality has an inherent time element. Something is immortal only if it lasts forever, that is, for all time. But what happens if time is not a factor that affects an entity, say, the human soul? Then that entity will not change over time, and hence, by definition, is immortal.

## Conclusion

Despite popular conceptions of spirituality as an emotional state, spirituality has more to do with rational thinking than emotions, at least directly. A relationship between two entities is defined as the overlap between the sets that represent the entities, and may be classified as rational or physical. Rational

relationships have no physical existence and are not bound by time and space that mainly characterize the physical world. Based on the model of reality as an object-relationship space, the model of thinking as the ability to traverse the relationships in this space, and the model of general intelligence as the ability to traverse rational relationships, it is concluded that no physical system, including the human brain, can have general intelligence. No physical system can sense or understand a rational relationship. This is because a physical system has no overlap with a non-physical entity, and thus, cannot possibly sense or understand it. Hence, only a non-physical system can sense and understand rational relationships. We call this non-physical system the soul and we call the realm it belongs to the spiritual realm.

The computers are no exception to the rule requiring a non-physical entity to perceive rational relationships. But the situation is more complicated because they do process rational information. The key to resolving this apparent contradiction is to recognize the difference between representation and understanding. The former is the encoding of information, while the latter is the ability to apply knowledge gained in one area to another unrelated area. Computers can only process representations of rational relationships encoded by humans. They are bereft of understanding such relationships independently.

Immortality of the soul is also established by the realization that the soul resides in the spiritual domain, which is outside the influence of time and space, and thus, is unaffected by time.

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NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Adib Taherzadeh, “*The Human Soul*,” *Bahá’í Studies* Number 11; Institute for Bahá’í Studies, Dundas, Ontario, Canada, 1996.
- <sup>2</sup> Anjam Khursheed, *Science And Religion*, p. 42, Oneworld Publications Ltd., London, Great Britain, 1987.
- <sup>3</sup> Douglas Hofstadter and Emmanuel Sander, *Surfaces and Essences: Analogy as the Fuel and Fire of Thinking*; New York, Basic Books, 2013.
- <sup>4</sup> *ibid.* p. 3.
- <sup>5</sup> *ibid.* p. 19.
- <sup>6</sup> *ibid.* pp. 235-238.
- <sup>7</sup> John Paul Vader, *For the Good of Mankind: Auguste Forel and the Bahá’í Faith*, George Ronald, Publisher, Kidlington, Oxford, United Kingdom, 1978, p. 8.
- <sup>8</sup> *ibid.* p. 8.
- <sup>9</sup> *ibid.* p. 8.

# Shoghi Effendi's Translation of Terms Related to Law in the Bahá'í Scripture

Moojan Momen<sup>1</sup>

The goal of this paper was to find out whether there was any pattern within Shoghi Effendi's translation of terms related to the word "law". In this section of the paper, I have search the translations of Bahá'u'lláh's writings by Shoghi Effendi and found instances where some word has been translated by Shoghi Effendi as "Laws" or "Law". I found that some 8-10 different words were translated by Shoghi Effendi in this way:

1. *Sharí'ah* – Sharí'at – plural *Shará'í'*
2. *Shar'*
3. *Hukm* – plural *Ahkám*
4. *Námús* – plural *nawámís*
5. *Qánún* – plural *qawánín*
6. *Aşl* – plural *uşúl*
7. *Amr* – plural *awámir*
8. *Hadd* – plural *hudúd*
9. *Sunna* – plural *sunan*
10. *Farđ* – plural *furúđ*

In the following, these words are considered in more details. In each case, the word is given followed by a dictionary definition and some words indicating the roots of the word and

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how it came to mean “law” in Shoghi Effendi’s translations. There is then some indication of whether the word occurs in the Qur’an and how it is used there. This is followed by one or more quotations, showing instances where Shoghi Effendi has translated this word as “law” or “laws”. And following that, one or more quotations in which Shoghi Effendi has translated this word in some other way.

1. *Sharí’ah* – *Sharí’at* – holy law. This is the usual word in Islamic Law for the holy law which has been derived from the Qur’an and Traditions – derived from root meaning “to go along a path”. Thus the implication is that by following the *Sharí’ah*, one is following the path of Muḥammad,

There is one Qur’anic occurrence of this term: “And now have We set thee (O Muḥammad) on a clear road (*sharí’ah*) of (Our) commandment; so follow it, and follow not the whims of those who know not.” [Q 45:18]

In the writings of Bahá’u’lláh, this term appears in the following passages, which have been translated by Shoghi Effendi:

I implore Thee by Them Who are the Tabernacles of Thy Divine holiness ... to grant that Thy servants may not be kept back from this **Divine Law** (*sharí’ah*) ... [PM 27]

Gather them, then, together around this **Divine Law** (*sharí’ah*), the covenant of which Thou hast established with all Thy Prophets and Thy Messengers, and Whose ordinances Thou hast written down in Thy Tablets and Thy Scriptures. [PM 106]

And yet no one hath paused to reflect that if the promised Qa’im should reveal the law (*sharí’at*) and ordinances (*aḥkám*) of a former Dispensation, why then should such traditions have been recorded, and why should there arise such a degree of strife and conflict that the people should regard the slaying of these

companions as an obligation imposed upon them ... ? [KI 245]

Where is He Who hath the authority to transform the Faith (*sharí`ah*) and the followers thereof? [KI 240]

Let your principal concern be to rescue the fallen from the slough of impending extinction, and to help him embrace the ancient Faith (*bih sharí`at-i baqá*) of God. [GWB 316]

Behold the absurdity of their saying; how far it hath strayed from the path (*sharí`at*) of knowledge and understanding! [KI 136-7]

... others accused Him of being “the one that withholdeth the people from the path (*sharí`at*) of faith and true belief” ... [KI 215]

And after Him there appeared from the Ridvan of the Eternal, the Invisible, the holy person of Salih, Who again summoned the people to the river of everlasting life (*bih sharí`at-i qurb-i báqiyih*). [KI 9]

In another sense, by the terms “sun”, “moon”, and “stars” are meant such laws and teachings as have been established and proclaimed in every Dispensation (*sharí`at*). [KI 38]

... this generation still waiteth in expectation of beholding the promised One who should uphold the Law of the Muhammadan Dispensation (*sharí`at-i furqán*). [KI 239]

Hence, it is clear and manifest that by the words “the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven” is intended the waywardness of the divines, and the annulment of

laws (*aḥkám*) firmly established by **divine Revelation** (*sharí`at*) ... [KI 41]

Were men to meditate on these words which have flowed from the Pen of the Divine Ordainer, they would, one and all, hasten to embrace the truth of **this God-given, and ever-enduring Revelation** (*bih sharí`at-i báqiyyih iláhiyyih*), and would testify to that which He Himself hath solemnly affirmed. [GWB 82]

1b. *Shará`i`* – *al-shará`i`* – *sharáyi`* – plural of Sharí`ah. These are other terms from the same root as sharí`ah and are translated by Shoghi Effendi thus:

These “clouds” signify, in one sense, the annulment of laws (*aḥkám*), the abrogation of **former Dispensations** (*shará`i`*), the repeal of rituals and customs (*qawá`id va rusúm*) current amongst men [KI 71-2]

Aside from these things, before his partaking of the reviving waters of faith, he had been so wedded to the traditions (*ḥudúdát*) of his forefathers, and so passionately devoted to the observance of their customs (*ádáb*) and laws (*shará`i`*), that he would have preferred to suffer death rather than violate one letter of those superstitious forms and manners (*umúr taqlídiyyih*) current amongst his people. [KI 155]

In such a manner hath the Kitáb-i-Aqdas been revealed that it attracteth and embraceth all the divinely appointed **Dispensations** (*sharáyi`*). [Bahá`u`lláh in GPB 216]

In all the Divine **Dispensations** (*sharáyi`*), the eldest son hath been given extraordinary distinctions. Even the station of prophethood hath been his birthright. [Bahá`u`lláh in GPB 148]

They clamored that He Whose advent the Bible had foretold must needs promulgate and fulfil the laws (*sharáyi`*) of Moses, whereas this youthful Nazarene, who laid claim to the station of the divine Messiah, had annulled the laws (*ḥukm*) of divorce and of the sabbath day ... [KI 18]

... and the dispensations of Thy providence have been promulgated (*shari`at al-shará`i`*) unto the followers of all religions. [PM 60]

1c. *Shar`ah* – This term is sometimes used as an alternative to *sharí`ah*. Historically this and *shar`* were the original form of the word used and Cantwell Smith has shown how the word used moved from meaning an ethical obligation of Muslims to follow the path set by God to meaning a legal obligation to act in a certain way because that is what the *sharí`ah* says.

In Qur`an the word *shar`atan* occurs in 5:48:

To each among you have we prescribed a law (*shar`atan*) and an open way (*minhajan*).

*Shoghi Effendi's translations:*

Thou shouldst, moreover, arise to enforce the law of God amongst them, that thou mayest be of those who are firmly established in His law (*shar`*). [GWB 234]

Among the utterances that foreshadow a new Law (*shar`*) and a new Revelation (*amr*) are the passages in the "Prayer of Nudbih" ... [KI 240]

Did He not speak a different language, and reveal a different Law (*shar`*)? [KI 150]

1d. *Shara`a* – verb – to legislate, enact, also to go along a path

Qur'an:

He has ordained for you (*shara`a lakum*) of religion what He enjoined upon Noah ...

*Shoghi Effendi's translations:*

We have, then, called into being (*shárá`ná*) a new creation, as a token of Our grace unto men. I am, verily, the All-Bountiful [GWB 29-30]

Gather ye around that which We have prescribed (*shárá`náhu*) unto you ... [ESW 55]

1e. *Tashrī`* – legislation. This word does not appear in the Qur'an.

*Shoghi Effendi's translations:*

This House of Justice enacteth the laws (*maṣḍar-i tashrī`st*) and the government enforceth them. The legislative body (*tashrī`*) must reinforce the executive (*tanfīdh*), the executive (*tanfīdh*) must aid and assist the legislative body (*tashrī`*) so that through the close union and harmony of these two forces, the foundation of fairness and justice may become firm and strong [WT 14-5]

2. *Hukm* – (legal) judgement, decision, regulation, rule. Comes from the same root as *hákim* – judge – thus signifies a judgement as made by a judge (or by God as the Judge).

There are multiple occurrences of this word and its derivatives in the Qur'an (e.g. 3:79, 5:43, 5:50, 6:57, 6:62, etc.).

*Shoghi Effendi's translations:*

Thus hath the sun of My **commandment** (*ḥukm*) shone forth above the horizon of My utterance ... [Bahá'u'lláh in ADJ 33]

Thus hath the **decree** (*ḥukm*) been irrevocably fixed by Him Who is the All-Wise. [Bahá'u'lláh in PDC 41]

None of the many Prophets sent down, since Moses ... ever altered the **law** (*ḥukm*) of the Qiblih. [KI 51]

## 2b. *Aḥkám* – plural of *ḥukm*

*Shoghi Effendi's translations:*

A Youth from Bani-Hashim shall be made manifest, Who will reveal a new Book and promulgate a new law (*aḥkám*) ... [KI 241]

... and the annulment (*naskh*) of laws (*aḥkám*) firmly established by divine Revelation (*sharí`at*) ... [KI 41]

... they idly contend that the law (*aḥkám*) formerly revealed, must in no wise be altered. [KI 240]

Think not that We have revealed unto you a mere code of laws (*al-aḥkám*). [GWB 332]

## 3. *Námús* – from Greek *nomos* = Latin *lex* – meaning law, rule, honour. It is non-Quranic.

*Shoghi Effendi's translations:*

O kings of the earth! **The Most Great Law** (*al-námús al-akbar*) hath been revealed in this Spot ... [KA 18]

Love is the **most great law** (*al-námús al-a`zam*) that ruleth this mighty and heavenly cycle ... [Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá 27]

Thine iniquity hath made **Gabriel** (*al-námús al-akbar*) to groan, and hath drawn tears from the Law of God (*sharí`at Alláh*) ... [ESW 81]

### 3b. *Nawámís* – plural of *námús*

*Shoghi Effendi's translations:*

The animal is the captive of nature and cannot transgress the rules (*qawánín*) and laws thereof (*nawámís tabí`at*) ... all other beings, whether of the mineral, the vegetable or the animal world, cannot deviate from the laws of nature (*nawámís tabí`at*) ... [TAF 10]

4. *Qánún* – plural *qawánín* – from the Greek – canon, established principle, basic rule, towards the end of the 19th century it was being used by secular reformers to indicate secular law, e.g. in their argument that society should be run by the rule of law rather than the whims of a despot. Bahá'u'lláh rarely uses this word. It is non-Quranic.

*Shoghi Effendi's translations:*

These principles (*usúl*) and laws (*qawánín*), these firmly-established and mighty systems, have proceeded from one Source, and are rays of one Light. [ESW 13]

[N.B. In the Tablet to Dr. Forel 'Abdu'l-Bahá frequently uses *qánún-i tabí`at* for laws of nature.]

Also *qánún* and words derived from it are used by 'Abdu'l-Bahá for laws of the Universal House of Justice:

And inasmuch as the House of Justice hath power to enact laws (*qawánín*) that are not expressly recorded in the Book and bear upon daily transactions (*mu`ámilát*), so also it hath power to repeal (*násikh*) the same. Thus for example, the House of Justice enacteth today a

certain law (*mas'ali'í qánúní*) and enforceth it, and a hundred years hence, circumstances having profoundly changed and the conditions having altered, another House of Justice will then have power, according to the exigencies of the time, to alter that law (*mas'alih qánúní*). This it can do because that law formeth no part of the divine explicit text. The House of Justice is both the initiator and the abrogator of its own laws. [WT 20]

It enacteth all **ordinances** (*qawánín*) and regulations (*aḥkám*) that are not to be found in the explicit Holy Text. [WT 14]

5. *Aṣl* – plural *Uṣúl* – means root or trunk and therefore has come to mean foundation, principles. Thus it means law in the sense of foundational principles. There are three Quranic occurrences of this word and its plural but only with the meaning of root of a tree.

*Shoghi Effendi's translations:*

...these divines who are still doubtful of, and dispute about, the theological obscurities of their faith, yet claim to be the exponents of the subtleties of the law of God (*uṣúl iláhiyyih*), and the expounders of the essential mysteries of His holy Word. [KI 83]

It behoveth you, O Ministers of State, to keep the precepts of God (*uṣúl Alláh*), and to forsake your own laws (*uṣúlikum*) and regulations ... [GWB 123]

Say: What! Cleave ye to your own devices (*uṣúlikum*), and cast behind your backs the precepts of God (*uṣúl Alláh*)? [GWB 124]

Have ye clung unto the promptings of your nature (*uṣúl anfusikum*), and cast behind your backs the statutes of God (*uṣúl Alláh*)? [ESW 49]



If your rules and principles (*uṣúlikum*) be founded on justice, why is it, then, that ye follow those which accord with your corrupt inclinations ... [GWB 124]

6. *Amr* – plural *awámir*: commands, orders (- also Faith, Cause); comes from the same root as *amír*, commander or ruler and thus means law as that which issues from the ruler or king (or from God as Ruler or King); also has a plural form *umúr* in which case it has the meanings: affairs, matters. This word and its derivatives occur numerous times in the Qur'an (e.g. 2:210, 3:128, 3:152, 3:154, etc.).

*Shoghi Effendi's translations:*

Thus hath His ordinance (*al-amr*) been sent down from the Kingdom of Him Who is the Most Exalted, the All-Wise. [GWB 278]

He Who is the Lord of Lords is come overshadowed with clouds, and the decree (*al-amr*) hath been fulfilled by God, the Almighty, the Unrestrained. [Bahá'u'lláh in PDC 31]

This Book is a heaven which We have adorned with the stars of Our commandments (*awámir*) and prohibitions. [Bahá'u'lláh in GPB 216]

... and enable him to remain a while in the island of Cyprus, and associate with Mirza Yahya, perchance he may become aware of the fundamentals of this Faith (*aṣl-i amr*) and of the source of the Divine laws and commandments (*maṣḍar-i awamir wa ahkám*). [ESW 121]

The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Day Spring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws (*maṭla' amrihi*), who representeth the Godhead ... [GWB 330-31]

The second is strict observance of the laws (*awámir*) He hath prescribed ... [GWB 290]

Aid Thou His Majesty the Shah to execute Thy laws (*awámirika*) and Thy commandments (*ahkámika*) ... [ESW 139]

7. *Hadd* – plural *hudúd* – this word signifies an edge, boundary, or limit, and hence has come to mean ordinance, legal punishment. It occurs in the Qur'an, where the plural is used in the sense of the limits set by God (e.g. 2:187, 2:229).

*Shoghi Effendi's translations:*

Reflect, how single-handed and alone they faced the world and all its peoples, and promulgated the Law of God (*hudúd Alláh*)! [KI 45]

They whom God hath endued with insight will readily recognize that the precepts laid down by God (*hudúd Alláh*) constitute the highest means for the maintenance of order in the world and the security of its peoples. [GWB 331]

Respect ye the divines amongst you, They whose acts conform to the knowledge they possess, who observe the statutes of God (*hudúd Alláh*), and decree the things God hath decreed in the Book. [Bahá'u'lláh in PDC 111]

Say: O people be obedient to the ordinances of God (*hudúd Alláh*), which have been enjoined in the Bayan by the Glorious, the Wise One. [Tablet of Ahmad]

Lay not aside the fear of God, O kings of the earth, and beware that ye transgress not the bounds which the Almighty hath fixed (*hudúd Alláh*). [GWB 250]

8. *Sunnah* – plural *sunan* – customary practice or procedure; came to mean in Islam the practice of the Prophet Muhammad – hence Sunni Muslims are those who follow the practice (sunna) of the Prophet. It is non-Quranic.

*Shoghi Effendi's translations:*

Ponder in thine heart the revelation of the Soul of God that pervadeth all His Laws (*al-sunan*) ... [GWB 160]

Empower me, then, O my God, to be reckoned among them that have clung to Thy laws (*sunanika*) and precepts (*ḥudúdátika*) for the sake of Thee ... [PM 299]

9. *Farḍ* – plural *fará'id* – duty, obligation, ordinances. This word and its derivatives occur in the Qur'an (e.g. 2:197, 28:85, 33:38, etc.)

*Shoghi Effendi's translation:*

Where is He Who is preserved to renew the ordinances and laws (*al-fará'id wa al-sunan*)? [KI 240]

It could be argued that this last one, *farḍ*, should not appear on the list as it appears to translate “ordinances” rather than “laws”. If one to exclude *farḍ* and also to count *shar'* and *sharí'ah* as one, since they are from the same root, then the list is eight long. If one include either it become nine and if one includes both it becomes ten.

## Legal Terms in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas

In the second part of this presentation, we will carry out the mirror of the above analysis and look at the cluster of words in English which we have found above to be associated with the word “law” in Shoghi Effendi's translations (law, commandment, ordinance, statutes, precepts) and see what

words in the Arabic text of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (including Questions and Answers) have been translated by these terms.

### 1a. Law

81. O kings of the earth! **The Most Great Law** (*al-námús al-akbar*) hath been revealed in this Spot, this scene of transcendent splendour.

98. Various petitions have come before Our throne from the believers, concerning laws (*no word*) from God, the Lord of the seen and the unseen, the Lord of all worlds. We have, in consequence, revealed this Holy Tablet and arrayed it with the mantle of His Law (*al-amr*) that haply the people may keep the commandments (*aḥkám*) of their Lord.

10. ANSWER: All are charged with obedience to the Kitáb-i-Aqdas; whatsoever is revealed therein is the Law of God (*ḥukm iláhí*) amid His servants. The injunction on pilgrims to the sacred House to shave the head hath been lifted.

31. QUESTION: Concerning the sacred verse: "The Lord hath prohibited ... the practice to which ye formerly had recourse when thrice ye had divorced a woman."

ANSWER: The reference is to the law (*ḥukm*) which previously made it necessary for another man to marry such a woman before she could again be wedded to her former husband ...

76. QUESTION: Concerning observance of the Fast by people engaged in hard labour during the month of fasting.

ANSWER: Such people are excused from fasting; however, in order to show respect to the law of God (*ḥukm Alláh*)

and for the exalted station of the Fast, it is most commendable and fitting to eat with frugality and in private.

100. ... In this regard, a law (*ḥukmī*) was revealed in the Land of Mystery, temporarily awarding the missing heirs' inheritance to the existing heirs until such time as the House of Justice shall be established ...

101. QUESTION: Concerning the law (*ḥukm*) on treasure trove.

Q&A 106: exalted station. Well is it with him who in the Day of God hath laid fast hold upon His precepts and hath not deviated from His true and fundamental Law (*qánun*).

## 1b. Laws

1. The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws (*maṭla` amrihi*) ...

4. Say: From My laws (*ḥudúdí*) the sweet-smelling savour of My garment can be smelled, and by their aid the standards of Victory will be planted upon the highest peaks.

5. Think not that We have revealed unto you a mere code of laws (*al-aḥkám*). Nay, rather, We have unsealed the choice Wine ...

7. ... Whenever My laws (*al-aḥkám*) appear like the sun in the heaven of Mine utterance, they must be faithfully obeyed by all, though My decree be such as to cause the heaven of every religion to be cleft asunder. He doeth what He pleaseth. He chooseth ...

7. ... Whoso hath inhaled the sweet fragrance of the All-Merciful, and recognized the Source of this

utterance, will welcome with his own eyes the shafts of the enemy, that he may establish the truth of the laws of God (*al-aḥkám*) amongst men.

26. ... Thus have the billows of the Ocean of Utterance surged, casting forth the pearls of the laws (*al-aḥkám*) decreed by the Lord of all mankind.

29. ... These, verily, are the Laws of God (*ḥudúd Alláh*); transgress them not at the prompting of your base and selfish desires.

45. ... We school you with the rod of wisdom and laws (*al-aḥkám*), like unto the father who educateth his son, and this for naught but the protection of your own selves and the elevation of your stations.

45. ... By My life, were ye to discover what We have desired for you in revealing Our holy laws (*awámiriná al-muqaddasah*), ye would offer up your very souls for this sacred, this mighty, and most exalted Faith.

96. O Most Mighty Ocean! Sprinkle upon the nations that with which Thou hast been charged by Him Who is the Sovereign of Eternity, and adorn the temples of all the dwellers of the earth with the vesture of His laws (*aḥkám*) through which all hearts will rejoice and all eyes be brightened.

120. ... Thus have We exhorted you in most of Our Epistles and now in this, Our Holy Tablet, above which hath beamed the Day-Star of the Laws (*aḥkám*) of the Lord, your God, the Powerful, the All-Wise.

142. Verily, He revealed certain laws (*al-aḥkám*) so that, in this Dispensation, the Pen of the Most High might have no need to move in aught but the glorification of His own transcendent Station and His most effulgent Beauty.

Since, however, We have wished to evidence Our bounty unto you, We have, through the power of truth, set forth these laws (no word) with clarity and mitigated what We desire you to observe. He, verily, is the Munificent, the Generous.

148. ... Such are the laws (*ḥudúd*) which God hath enjoined (*farāḍat*) upon you, such His commandments (*awámir*) prescribed unto you in His Holy Tablet; obey them with joy and gladness, for this is best for you, did ye but know.

166. ... Though he was occupied both night and day in setting down what he conceived to be the laws and ordinances of God (*aḥkám Alláh*), yet when He Who is the Unconstrained appeared, not one letter thereof availed him, or he would not have turned away from a Countenance that hath illumined the faces of the well-favoured of the Lord.

42. ANSWER: In the laws (*aḥkám*) revealed in Persian We have ordained that in this Most Mighty Dispensation the residence and the household furnishings are exempt — that is, such furnishings as are necessary.

## 2. Commandment, Commandments

65. ... And in this We have yet other purposes. Thus hath Our commandment (*al-amr*) been ordained.

70. Should a woman be divorced in consequence of a proven act of infidelity, she shall receive no maintenance during her period of waiting. Thus hath the day-star of Our commandment (*al-amr*) shone forth resplendent from the firmament of justice.

72. ... Thus, by His mercy, hath the commandment (*al-amr*) been recorded by the Pen of justice.

97. ... O people! Deal not faithlessly with the Right of God, nor, without His leave, make free with its disposal. Thus hath His **commandment** (*al-amr*) been established in the holy Tablets, and in this exalted Book.

108. ... Thus hath the sun of Our **commandment** (*al-ḥukm*) shone forth above the horizon of Our utterance. Blessed, then, be those who do Our bidding.

138. ... Such is the **commandment** (*amr*) of the Lord, aforesaid and hereafter; beware lest ye choose instead the part of ignominy and abasement.

148. ... Such is the **commandment** (*amran*) which He hath enjoined upon you in this resplendent Tablet.

18. ANSWER: The **commandment** (*ḥukm*) regarding ablutions must, in any case, be observed.

38. ANSWER: According to the **commandment** (*ḥukm*) revealed in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, both parties must be content; unless both are willing, reunion cannot take place.

Q&A 105. ... Should a father neglect this most weighty **commandment** (*amr*) laid down in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas by the Pen of the Eternal King, he shall forfeit rights of fatherhood, and be accounted guilty before God.

2. ... They that have violated the Covenant of God by breaking His **commandments** (*awámirihi*), and have turned back on their heels, these have erred grievously in the sight of God, the All-Possessing, the Most High.

3. O ye peoples of the world! Know assuredly that My **commandments** (*awámirí*) are the lamps of My loving providence among My servants, and the keys of My mercy for My creatures ...



3. ... Were any man to taste the sweetness of the words which the lips of the All-Merciful have willed to utter, he would, though the treasures of the earth be in his possession, renounce them one and all, that he might vindicate the truth of even **one of His commandments** (*amran min awámirihi*), shining above the Dayspring of His bountiful care and loving-kindness.

4. ... Observe **My commandments** (*ḥudúdí*), for the love of My beauty.

4. ... By My life! He who hath drunk the choice wine of fairness from the hands of My bountiful favour will circle around **My commandments** (*awámirí*) that shine above the Dayspring of My creation.

17. ... Hold ye fast unto His statutes (*awámir Alláh*) and **commandments** (*aḥkámíhi*), and be not of those who, following their idle fancies and vain imaginings, have clung to the standards fixed by their own selves, and cast behind their backs the standards laid down by God.

67. ... Obey ye **My commandments** (*awámirí*), and follow not the ungodly, they who have been reckoned as sinners in God's Holy Tablet.

88. ... Bind ye the broken with the hands of justice, and crush the oppressor who flourisheth with the rod of the **commandments** (*awámir*) of your Lord, the Ordainer, the All-Wise.

98. ... that haply the people may keep the **commandments** (*aḥkám*) of their Lord.

125. Say: True liberty consisteth in man's submission unto **My commandments** (*awámirí*), little as ye know it.

147. ... Keep ye the statutes and **commandments of God** (*ḥudúd Alláh wa sunanihi*); nay, guard them as ye would your very eyes, and be not of those who suffer grievous loss.

186. ... Say: This is the Dayspring of Divine knowledge, if ye be of them that understand, and the Dawning-place of **God's commandments** (*awámirihi*), if ye be of those who comprehend.

### 3. Ordinance

1. ... It behoveth everyone who reacheth this most sublime station, this summit of transcendent glory, to observe **every ordinance** (*má amara bihi*) of Him Who is the Desire of the world.

20. ... Such was the **ordinance** (*ḥukm*) of My Forerunner, He Who extolleth My Name in the night season and at the break of day.

63. ... Such is the **ordinance** (*al-amr*) which, in truth and justice, hath been recorded by the Pen of Revelation.

77. God hath relieved you of the **ordinance** (*má nuzzila* – what has been revealed) laid down in the Bayan concerning the destruction of books.

16. **QUESTION:** Is the **ordinance** (*ḥukm*) that the body of the deceased should be carried no greater distance than one hour's journey applicable to transport by both land and sea?

42. **QUESTION:** The **ordinance** (no word) of Ḥuqúqu'lláh is revealed in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas.

54. **ANSWER:** Her share of the inheritance should be distributed among the seven categories of heirs according to the **ordinance** (*ḥukm*) of the Book.

71. ANSWER: The ordinance (*ḥukm*) of fasting is such as hath already been revealed.

89. ANSWER: Nineteen out of one hundred is established by the ordinance (*ḥukm*) of God.

94. ANSWER: ... This is an ordinance (*ḥudúd*) of God, and he who violateth it is verily of those who have transgressed.

102. ANSWER: The ordinance (*ḥukm*) of God is that real estate which hath ceased to yield income, that is, from which no profit accrueth, is not liable to payment of Huquq.

17. These are the ordinances (*ḥudúd*) of God that have been set down in the Books and Tablets by His Most Exalted Pen.

166. ... Though he was occupied both night and day in setting down what he conceived to be the laws and ordinances of God (*aḥkám Alláh*) ...

37. QUESTION: In the holy ordinances (*aḥkám*) governing inheritance, the residence and personal clothing of the deceased have been allotted to the male offspring.

63. ANSWER: ... Some years ago a number of the ordinances (*aḥkám*) of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas including that Obligatory Prayer were, for reasons of wisdom, recorded separately and sent away together with other sacred writings, for the purposes of preservation and protection.

#### 4. Statutes

17. ... Hold ye fast unto **His statutes** (*awámir Alláh*) and **commandments** (*aḥkámihí*), and be not of those who, following their idle fancies and vain imaginings ...

45. ... Beware lest, through compassion, ye neglect to carry out the **statutes** (no word) of the religion of God; do that which hath been ...

71. ... Observe ye the **statutes** (*ḥudúd Alláh*) and **precepts** (*sunanihi*) of your Lord, and walk ye in this Way which hath been laid out before you in righteousness and truth.

147 ... Keep ye the **statutes and commandments** of God (*ḥudúd Alláh wa sunanihi*) ...

#### 5. Precepts

2. They whom God hath endued with insight will readily recognize that the **precepts** (*ḥudúd*) laid down by God constitute the highest means for the maintenance of order in the world and the security of its peoples.

29. ... The sincere among His servants will regard the **precepts** (*ḥudúd*) set forth by God as the Water of Life to the followers of every faith ...

62 ... Take ye hold of the **precepts** (*sunan*) of God with all your strength and power, and abandon the ways of the ignorant.

71. ... Observe ye the **statutes** (*ḥudúd Alláh*) and **precepts** (*sunanihi*) of your Lord ...

93: ANSWER: ... Blessed be such men and women as pay heed, and observe His **precepts** (no word).

Q&A: 106: ... Well is it with him who in the Day of God hath laid fast hold upon **His precepts** (*usúl Alláh*) ...

The above analysis enables us to derive a table of what original terms in the text of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas have resulted in these five English words in the translation:

Table of Legal Terms in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas

	Hukm	Amr	Namús	Hudúd	Qánún	Sunan	Uşúl	None*	Total
Law	14.5 <sup>†</sup>	3	1	3	1				22.5
Commandment	5	15 <sup>‡</sup>		1		1			22
Ordinance	8.5 <sup>†</sup>	2 <sup>§</sup>		2				2	14.5
Statutes		1		2				1	4
Precepts				2		2	1	1	6
<b>Totals</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>69</b>

#### NOTES TO TABLE

\* The column "None" indicates where the word appears in English but there is no corresponding Arabic/Persian word in the original.

† In the phrase "Though he was occupied both night and day in setting down what he conceived to be the laws and ordinances of God (*aḥkám Alláh*)," both laws and ordinances appear to have been translated by *aḥkám*, therefore I have given 0.5 to each.

‡ I am counting the occurrence "he might vindicate the truth of even one of His commandments (*amran min awámirihi*)," as one although some may consider it to be two.

§ I have included one occasion in which a construction using the verb *amara* has been translated as "ordinance" ("It behoveth everyone who reacheth this most sublime station ... to observe every ordinance (*má amara bihi*) of Him Who is the Desire of the world.") Some may prefer to omit this.

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## Conclusion

Shoghi Effendi does not seem to have maintained any pattern in his translation of the words associated with “law”. He does not seem to have distinguished any nuances of meaning in the 8-10 Arabic/Persian words that occur in Bahá'í scripture and have been translated by him as “law” or other equivalent terms. Nor indeed does he consistently use such terms as “ordinance”, “commandment”, “statute” or “precept” to designate any particular Arabic/Persian word. He appears to have relied on his literary sensibilities in choosing which words to use when translating this range of words in Arabic/Persian to a parallel range of words in English.

# Shared Prosperity

## How Does That Work?

Wendi Momen

In January 2013 Save the Children published a report in response to the UN's appeal for suggestions on what should replace the eight Millennium Development Goals that come to an end in 2015. Entitled 'Ending Poverty in Our Generation', the report outlined an ambitious new development framework which, it said, could help all countries end extreme poverty in the next 20 years.<sup>1</sup> It was the first time that an organisation proposed specific new targets to replace the MDGs.<sup>2</sup>

The theme was taken up with alacrity and the idea of ending extreme poverty by 2030 became rather an anthem in the following months. On 2 April 2013 Dr. Jim Yong Kim, the president of the World Bank, announced that the World Bank Group's mission to help free the world of poverty focused on two specific goals: to end extreme poverty for the 1.2 billion people who continue to live with hunger and destitution by 2030 and to promote shared prosperity.<sup>3</sup>

When asked what the term 'shared prosperity' meant for the Bank he responded that 'The shared prosperity goal captures two key elements, economic growth and equity, and it will seek to foster income growth among the bottom 40 percent of a country's population. Without sustained economic growth, poor people are unlikely to increase their living standards. But growth is not enough by itself. Improvement in the Shared Prosperity Indicator requires growth to be inclusive of the less

well-off.’ But he went on to say that the goal of shared prosperity goal did not imply reducing inequality by redistributing wealth, by ‘suggesting that countries redistribute an economic pie of a certain size, or to take from the rich and give to the poor’. Rather, his point was that ‘if a country can grow the size of its pie, while at the same time share it in ways that boost the income of the bottom 40 percent of its population, then it is moving toward shared prosperity. So the goal combines the notions of rising prosperity and equity.’ ‘Ending extreme poverty’ is defined by him as ‘the percentage of people living with less than \$1.25 a day to fall to no more than 3 percent globally by 2030’. Promoting shared prosperity means ‘fostering income growth of the bottom 40 percent of the population in every country.’ He went on to say that ‘Ending extreme poverty within a generation and promoting shared prosperity must be achieved in such a way as to be sustainable over time and across generations. This requires promoting environmental, social, and fiscal sustainability. We need to secure the long-term future of our planet and its resources so future generations do not find themselves in a wasteland.’

The same theme was taken up by the UK Government, among other governments. In its *Corporate Report: Economic development for shared prosperity and poverty reduction: a strategic framework*<sup>4</sup> published on 31 January 2014 by the Department for International Development (DfID), it stated:

Economic development is key to eradicating poverty. Accelerating progress is essential if the goal of zero extreme poverty by 2030 is to be achieved. The evidence is clear that this will require much higher growth rates in many countries, more inclusive growth – in particular for girls and women, and actions to tackle the structural barriers that deny poor people the chance to raise their incomes and find jobs.



The UK government can do more to help partner governments address the causes as well as the symptoms of poverty. This involves putting in place the building blocks that are crucial for countries to exit poverty: peace, the rule of law, property rights, stable business conditions, and honest and responsive governments, accountable to their citizens.

The Department for International Development's (DFID) economic development strategic framework highlights the importance of the institutions that encourage private investment and export growth: free and fair markets; sound macroeconomic management; clear and consistently applied policies, regulations and laws; secure property rights; and functioning commercial courts.

The private sector is the engine of growth. Successful businesses drive growth, create jobs and pay the taxes that finance services and investment ...

The concept of shared prosperity as explained by the organizations above stands in contrast to a view held by much of civil society, an example of which is the left-wing New Economy Working Group<sup>5</sup> whose agenda is to 'Promote public values and policies that support an equitable distribution of money and real wealth to meet the needs of all.'

'Extreme inequality in the distribution of wealth, income and opportunity,' it says, 'undermines and distorts all that we care about – democracy and civic life, economic health and vitality, ecological balance, and physical health and culture. Moving toward greater equality is critical to building healthy, democratic, and economically sustainable communities. The solution is not simply raising the floor and alleviating poverty, but directly addressing the overconcentration of wealth. Our team promotes a broad analysis of the impact of

extreme inequalities and advocates for far-reaching policy interventions that broaden prosperity and redistribute dangerous concentrations of wealth.’

It frames its key proposals for sharing prosperity thus:

According to market fundamentalists, equality is not an issue. Dismissing the issue of a finite ecosystem, they believe that poverty is best ended by growing the economy to bring up the bottom. If we lived in a world of endless resources and open frontiers, this might be a possibility. This, however, is not our reality. In the absence of a strong commitment to policies that maintain an equitable distribution of income, conventional economic growth increases the wealth gap even as it destroys the environment.

Effective corrective action will require a number of approaches, including:

- Income policies that assure every person access to an income adequate to meet basic needs and favour those who produce real value through productive work for example teachers, entrepreneurs, factory and service workers, family farmers, agricultural labourers, and hospital attendants – over those who profit from financial speculation and passive financial returns.
- Progressive taxation and public spending policies that continuously recycle wealth from those who have far more than they need at the top to those at the bottom who lack access to the basic essentials of a secure and fulfilling life.
- Equitable development policies. Land use and regional development policies that limit sprawl, support multi-strata development, and prevent geographical division by class and race and between affluent and blighted neighbourhoods.

- Broad participation in ownership and access to commonwealth. Work and ownership policies that minimize the class divide by encouraging every person to engage in productive work and to share in the benefits and responsibilities of ownership. Broad access to the shared wealth of the commons is also essential.

The key concepts I derive from these reports and statements are:

*From World Bank:*

- the key elements of shared prosperity are economic growth and equity
- without sustained economic growth, poor people are unlikely to increase their living standards
- living standards are linked to economic growth and that growth must be sustained
- promoting shared prosperity means ‘fostering income growth of the bottom 40 percent of the population in every country’

*From DIFD UK:*

- economic development is key to eradicating poverty
- this will require much higher growth rates in many countries, more inclusive growth – in particular for girls and women, and actions to tackle the structural barriers that deny poor people the chance to raise their incomes and find jobs
- The private sector is the engine of growth. Successful businesses drive growth, create jobs and pay the taxes that finance services and investment.

From New Economy Working Group:

- moving toward greater equality is critical to building healthy, democratic, and economically sustainable communities
- the solution is not simply raising the floor and alleviating poverty, but directly addressing the over-concentration of wealth
- it advocates for far-reaching policy interventions that broaden prosperity and redistribute dangerous concentrations of wealth

Thus for all these agencies, prosperity is defined almost exclusively in terms of having enough money, or being enabled to find a way to access enough money, to buy enough goods and services to provide for one's and one's family's needs. Shared prosperity is about money and enabling those without to have it or to have more, either by baking a bigger pie so that everyone can have a big enough piece to provide for his needs (economic growth) OR by transferring a proportion of the pie from those who have a large proportion to those who have none or hardly any. In both instances it is about getting money into the hands of people so that they can purchase the things they need to live, including basics such as food and shelter and healthcare, and the less tangible but still important 'secure and fulfilling life', 'democracy and civic life', 'economic health and vitality', 'ecological balance' and 'culture'.

Poverty is similarly defined as a lack of money or the things money can buy: as the Oxford Dictionary says, 'The condition of having little or no wealth or material possessions; indigence, destitution, want (in various degrees)'. 'Extreme poverty' is defined as 'living with less than \$1.25 a day'.

Using these definitions, the Save the Children report stated that 'The Millennium Development Goals have lifted 600 million people out of poverty ... the number of under-five deaths worldwide declined from nearly 12 million in 1990 to under 7 million in 2011, and an additional 56 million children

enrolled in primary school from 1999 to 2009'. For these institutions, the goal of shared prosperity is:

- increasing the welfare of the poor and vulnerable
- raising living standards
- building healthy, democratic, and economically sustainable communities

The ways to achieve these goals are:

- sustained economic growth
- sustainable growth that achieves the maximum possible increase in living standards of the less well-off (World Bank)
- economic development
- accelerated economic growth (DFID)
- redistribution of wealth (NEWG)

These institutions identify the building blocks that are crucial for countries to exit poverty as:

- peace
- the rule of law
- property rights
- stable business conditions
- honest and responsive governments, accountable to their citizens

They posit that the key elements that are required to eradicate poverty are:

- social, economic, and institutional arrangements that foster welfare and income growth of the less well-off
- generating jobs and economic opportunities

- an investment in people, to promote growth and equity over time and across generations with the aim of creating an ‘opportunity society’
- implementing policies that create equality
- creating conditions that enable women to contribute to their fullest potential
- fostering an inclusive society
- engaging and developing the private sector
- developing institutions that encourage private investment and export growth
- improving international rules for shared prosperity

These institutions consider that the instigators, or protagonists, of development are:

- government
- the private sector
- investors
- policy-makers

## The Bahá’í approach

*Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and centre your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements.* [GWB 213]

### Identifying the issue

While there is much congruence between the approach to shared prosperity of these organizations and that of the Bahá’í community, there are some key differences. Perhaps the most significant difference is in identifying what the core issue, or problem, actually is. The agencies described above, and many

others like them, identify the core problem as poverty itself, which needs to be remedied urgently with a variety of measures including policy changes; transfers of wealth; educational, training and job opportunities; and economic growth. Bahá'ís, however, identify the core problem as something else entirely, requiring a completely different remedy:

We must not allow ourselves to forget the continuing, appalling burden of suffering under which millions of human beings are always groaning – a burden which they have borne for century upon century and which it is the Mission of Bahá'u'lláh to lift at last. The principal cause of this suffering, which one can witness wherever one turns, is the corruption of human morals and the prevalence of prejudice, suspicion, hatred, untrustworthiness, selfishness and tyranny among men. It is not merely material well-being that people need. What they desperately need is to know how to live their lives – they need to know who they are, to what purpose they exist, and how they should act towards one another; and, once they know the answers to these questions they need to be helped to gradually apply these answers to every-day behaviour. It is to the solution of this basic problem of mankind that the greater part of all our energy and resources should be directed ... [From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Italy, 19 November 1974]

Thus the Bahá'í approach identifies a failure of morals and ethics – which is a spiritual issue – as the principal cause of poverty. The approach taken by many of the agencies that are working to establish shared prosperity neglect or minimize the spiritual dimension of the human being and the effect this has on every aspect of individual and community life. The nature of the 'problem', meaning of shared prosperity, the nature of poverty, the way to address it and who the key protagonists and beneficiaries are, the nature of the human being, the nature of

community and the ultimate purpose and goal of development – for most development agencies all these are cast in primarily in material terms, centring on material wealth and well-being, while the Bahá'ís see these as primarily spiritual issues at their root which require an understanding of the spiritual nature and purpose of the human being to effectively and sustainably address these material aspects of human life. That is, if the spiritual, ethical, moral dimension of the human experience is not addressed and corrected, if people do not understand the purpose of their lives, then efforts to improve the well-being of those in need, to lift them out of poverty, to extend the material benefits of the world to them, will not, ultimately, succeed, as the reasons why people are in this condition will not have changed: they will still be subject to 'prejudice, suspicion, hatred, untrustworthiness, selfishness and tyranny'. People will still exploit them, harm them, treat them unjustly – a condition which exists for many people who live in the wealthiest parts of the world.

### **Material and spiritual measures required**

The Bahá'í International Community (BIC), the international NGO representing the worldwide Bahá'í community in global fora such as the United Nations, has for decades researched the Bahá'í teachings that inform Bahá'í thinking on current issues, including the economy, the prosperity of humankind and the eradication of extreme poverty. It has identified a number of principles and themes from the Bahá'í writings that bear on these complex issues. Far from being a set of theoretical, noble ideas, the insights offered by the Bahá'ís are born out of their experience of applying Bahá'í principles and teachings to their own reality. Bahá'ís are still in a 'learning mode' concerning these issues and are cautiously applying their learning and understanding to their own communities at the neighbourhood and local levels. What they have learned so far is that both material and spiritual measures are required to create shared prosperity.



The Bahá'í community sees all the issues of the day as interrelated and requiring a holistic approach to their resolution, including 'an organic change in the structure of present-day society' [WOB 42]. It does not accept what it considers to be the 'erroneous belief that those with power and resources already possess everything needed for society to thrive' [BIC Document #12-1412]. It takes a nuanced approach to shared prosperity and poverty, does not seek simplistic answers nor does it offer any. It takes into account not just the physical and material aspects of human life but also the cultural, the emotional, the psychological and the ineffable. Viewed from this perspective, the current world situation is 'rooted' in the destructive 'values and attitudes that shape relationships at all levels of society', while 'poverty can be described as the absence of those ethical, social and material resources needed to develop the moral, intellectual and social capacities of individuals, communities and institutions' [BIC Document #08-0214].

The Bahá'í International Community confirms that a lack of material wealth creates personal suffering, damages individuals and communities and is a major obstacle to peace: 'To be sure, material wealth is of critical importance to the achievement of individual and collective goals; by the same token, a strong economy is a key component of a vibrant social order' [BIC Document #12-0201. At the same time, as noted above, it considers that the materialistic world view does not capture the totality of human experience and that the real causes of poverty cannot be conceived terms of a lack of material wealth alone.

The Bahá'í Office of Social and Economic Development points out:

To seek coherence between the spiritual and the material does not imply that the material goals of development are to be trivialized. It does require, however, the rejection of approaches to development which define it as the transfer to all societies of the ideological

convictions, the social structures, the economic practices, the models of governance – in the final analysis, the very patterns of life – prevalent in certain highly industrialized regions of the world. [OSED, *Social Action*]

Thus the Bahá'í approach to shared prosperity is not the transfer of ideas or things from one community to another but a complete rethinking of the nature of prosperity, of the human being, of development and of civilization itself. That rethinking is to be informed by the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í Faith.

### Rethinking Prosperity

The Bahá'í community casts the concept of prosperity as a matter of justice and the realignment of values:

*Divine justice will become manifest in human conditions and affairs, and all mankind will find comfort and enjoyment in life ... in the aggregate community there will be equalization and readjustment of values and interests. In the future there will be no very rich nor extremely poor. There will be an equilibrium of interests, and a condition will be established which will make both rich and poor comfortable and content.* [PUP 132]

Prosperity is seen as an aspect of the 'ever-advancing civilization' which Bahá'u'lláh indicates 'all men have been created to carry forward'. [GWB 215] Such a civilization requires:

... the articulation of a vibrant and compelling vision of human prosperity at its widest and most inclusive. Such a vision must address the need for harmony between varying aspects of development (cultural, technological, economic, social, moral, spiritual), and must give rise to

a widely-shared sense of common purpose. This approach, based in a recognition of the capacity and responsibility of all to contribute to a better world transcends us/them patterns of thought that divide the world into ‘haves’ who grant opportunities for participation to the ‘have nots’. [BIC Document #12-1412]

The task of creating such prosperity is more than ‘appeals for action against the countless ills afflicting society. It must be galvanized by a vision of human prosperity in the fullest sense of the term – an awakening to the possibilities of the spiritual and material well-being now brought within grasp.’ [BIC Document #95-0303]

### **Rethinking the nature of the human being**

Fundamental to an understanding of the Bahá’í approach to shared prosperity and development is its concept of the nature of the human being. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the son Bahá’u’lláh, affirms that ‘there are two natures in man: the physical nature and the spiritual nature’ [SAQ 118] but that the enduring, eternal, essential reality of the human being is spiritual [‘Abdu’l-Bahá in BWF 262-3], that ‘Man is, in reality, a spiritual being’. [PT 72] Bahá’u’lláh asserts that the human being a ‘mine rich in gems of inestimable value’ that are to be dedicated to the service of humanity. [GWB 260]

Thus any vision of shared prosperity and development must be responsive to the reality of the spiritual nature of the human being. The prevailing theories and practices of development, however, tend to promote the satisfying of people’s material ambitions over their spiritual goals. It is the purpose of Bahá’í development processes to achieve shared prosperity to reverse this balance.

## Rethinking Development

Bahá'ís believe that 'Every member of the human family has not only the right to benefit from a materially and spiritually prosperous civilization' but also that such a civilization will 'not emerge through the efforts exerted by a select group of nations or even a network of national and international agencies'. Rather, Bahá'ís understand that 'the challenge must be faced by all of humanity' and that every person has an 'obligation to contribute' towards the construction of that civilization'. 'Social action should operate, then, on the principle of universal participation.' [OSD, *Social Action*]

Bahá'ís see the purpose of development as contributing to the foundation for a new social and international order, capable of creating and sustaining conditions in which human beings can advance morally, culturally, and intellectually.

This purpose is rooted in the understanding that the transformation of society will involve profound changes in the individual as well as the deliberate and systematic re-creation of social structures.

Social change is not a project that one group of people carries out for the benefit of another. Enduring change depends upon coherent efforts to transform both the individual and society. Social change is neither the result of 'upgrading the individual' nor is it the result of an exclusive focus on reforming social and political structures. [BIC Document #11-0422]

## Rethinking Capacity-Building

Thus a key component of development is capacity-building within a population so that local people can develop the attitudes, knowledge and skills that will enable them to address the issues that affect them and then apply the most appropriate

measures to effect change for themselves. Central to the Bahá'í concept of capacity-building is that 'activities should start on a modest scale and only grow in complexity in keeping with available human resources' [*Social Action*]. This is very different from the practice of outside agencies providing communities with services such as water systems and schools, or individuals with loans and clothing. When viewed from a popular perspective, the Bahá'í approach of gradually building the capacity within a local community to create its own services and systems seems painfully slow and almost unfair, apparently depriving people from the very things that will enable them to progress quickly or to save lives. Yet it has often been seen that by focusing only on providing people with goods and services, the very people who should be the protagonists of development are disempowered and become dependent on outside agencies. While the goals of improving people's lives and their living conditions are important, to sustain that improvement by enabling people 'to contribute significantly to their own progress' [*Social Action*] is the fundamental goal of development for Bahá'ís.

For Bahá'ís, the sequence of courses provided by the Ruhi Institute has proved to be a most effective way to build capacity gradually in individuals and in communities and to transfer these capacities to institutions.

### Rethinking Work

The concept of work, too, is recast by the Bahá'í approach such that it is not merely a means towards material ends:

Work needs to be seen not only as a means to securing an individual and family's basic needs, but also as a channel to developing one's craft, refining one's character, and contributing to the welfare and progress of society. Work, no matter how humble and simple, when performed with an attitude of service, is a means

to contribute to the advancement of our communities, countries and global society. [BIC Document #07-0211]

Bahá'u'lláh Himself lifted work to the station of worship:

*It is incumbent upon each one of you to engage in some occupation – such as a craft, a trade or the like. We have exalted your engagement in such work to the rank of worship of the one true God.* [KA v. 33]

The significant of this concept for shared prosperity is enormous, with implications for the economy as a whole; how business operates, recruits and trains employees, and deals with all stakeholders in a community; the shape of work within an enterprise; and who the key players are in an enterprise and how they are to be remunerated.

### Rethinking civilization

As we have seen, Bahá'u'lláh states that humanity has been created to advance civilization and lists the attributes that people are to have in order to accomplish this:

*All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. The Almighty beareth Me witness: To act like the beasts of the field is unworthy of man. Those virtues that befit his dignity are forbearance, mercy, compassion and loving-kindness towards all the peoples and kindreds of the earth.* [GWB 215]

The nature of the civilization that is to be carried forward, however, is not merely a material one, as many might think. Bahá'is recognize that many aspects of today's civilization do not benefit people and are even dangerous and harmful to individuals and humanity as a whole. 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote:

*... until material achievements, physical accomplishments and human virtues are reinforced by spiritual perfections, luminous qualities and characteristics of mercy, no fruit or result shall issue therefrom, nor will the happiness of the world of humanity, which is the ultimate aim, be attained. For although, on the one hand, material achievements and the development of the physical world produce prosperity, which exquisitely manifests its intended aims, on the other hand dangers, severe calamities and violent afflictions are imminent. [SWAB 283-4]*

Further, what Bahá'ís anticipate is what Shoghi Effendi, head of the Bahá'í Faith from 1921 to 1957, identifies as the 'birth and efflorescence of a *world* civilization' [CF 6, emphasis mine], not the extension of a western, Asian or other regional one, a civilization that is 'the child' of the Most Great Peace. Such a civilization is, 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes, a product of the spiritual quality 'love':

*Love is the spirit of life unto the adorned body of mankind, the establisher of true civilization in this mortal world, and the shedder of imperishable glory upon every high-aiming race and nation. [SWAB 27]*

The birth of such a civilization is a far-distant expectation for Bahá'ís, who consider its establishment 'as the furthestmost limits in the organization of human society' along with the 'emergence of a world community, the consciousness of world citizenship' and 'the founding of a world ... culture'. [WO 163] Nevertheless, Bahá'ís claim that it is the efforts that humanity makes today to realign its values, morals and the material welfare that derive from these that will begin the process of building that civilization.

## The goal of shared prosperity

For Bahá'ís the goal of shared prosperity is: 'a just, peaceful and sustainable society', which provides a 'harmonious dynamic between the material and non-material (or moral) dimensions' of human life, which has at its base the fundamental truth of the equality of women and men and which incorporates 'the generation of knowledge, the cultivation of trust and trustworthiness, eradication of racism and violence, promotion of art, beauty, science, and the capacity for collaboration and the peaceful resolution of conflicts'. [BIC Document #10-0503]

Bahá'ís believe that ways to achieve these goals are, on the one hand,

- to incorporate 'all people, regardless of material wealth, into the advancement of civilization'
- to articulate 'a vibrant and compelling vision of human prosperity at its widest and most inclusive'
- to ensure the 'harmony between varying aspects of development (cultural, technological, economic, social, moral, spiritual) so as to embed 'a widely-shared sense of common purpose' [BIC Document #12-1412]

and, on the other,

- to recognize that 'a flourishing society cannot be built by the materially wealthy on behalf of the materially poor'
- to reexamine and redesign social and economic 'structures, which have contributed to the exclusion of the materially poor'
- to genuinely reassess 'the distribution of power and wealth', and to recognize and recast 'the inherent relationship between the extremes of wealth and poverty'



- to reframe ‘progress’ in ‘terms of the harmony between the moral and material dimensions of human life’ [BIC Document #12-1412]

Bahá’ís identify the building blocks that are crucial for countries and people to exit poverty as:

- peace
- unity
- trustworthiness [BIC Document #05-1002]
- the freedom of conscience, thought, and religion [BIC Document #05-1002]
- justice as the organizing principle of society [BIC Document #95-0303]
- the elimination of the extremes of poverty and wealth [Shoghi Effendi, ‘The Faith of Bahá’u’lláh’] through such measures as taxation, fair pay and education
- the establishment of human rights and responsibilities, with a balance struck between the preservation of individual freedom and the promotion of the collective good [BIC Document #12-1012]
- the equality of women and men [BIC Doc #12-0227]
- the rule of law
- constitutional and democratic government
- the protection of human rights
- economic development
- religious tolerance
- the promotion of useful sciences and technologies
- programmes of public welfare [all the above, The Universal House of Justice, 26 November 2003, citing ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, SDC]

The Bahá'ís posit that the key elements for the eradication of poverty are:

- a recognition of the oneness of humanity [BIC Doc #05-1002]
- a coherent relationship between the material and spiritual dimensions of human life [BIC Doc #12-0201]
- recognition that every individual has a contribution to make to the betterment of society [BIC Doc #12-0201]
- the ethic of reciprocity: an understanding that the interests of the individual and of the wider community are inextricably linked [BIC Doc #11-0118]
- voluntary sharing [‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Tablet to the Hague]
- consultation as the basic tool of decision-making and learning [BIC Docs #12-0620 and #10-0503]
- deliberate and conscious changes in individual choices and in institutional structures and norms [BIC Doc #10-0503]
- universal education [The Universal House of Justice, 26 November 2003]

The Bahá'ís consider that the primary instigators, or protagonists, of development are:

- ‘the people themselves’
- communities
- institutions

as ‘the responsibility lies with society – its communities and social institutions – to make it possible for all people to contribute their energies and talents to the construction of a more just and equitable global community. [BIC Document #:12-1412]

For Bahá'ís, the beneficiaries of shared prosperity, of development, are not just the materially poor or those already wealthy who wish to capitalize on new markets, exploit an emerging workforce or patent traditional resources for their own gain:

Its beneficiaries must be all of the planet's inhabitants, without distinction, without the imposition of conditions unrelated to the fundamental goals of such a reorganization of human affairs. [BIC Document #95-0303]

## Conclusion

From the Bahá'í perspective, shared prosperity is more than the amelioration of material deprivation, profound as that is. It is not the transfer of goods, services, finances, knowledge, technology and ideas from one community to another, nor is it a project that one group of people carries out for the benefit of another. It requires the development of a new mindset, one that does not polarize people, making one set victims and another the rescuers, but instead sees the whole world as one community, one family. Every person is a participant in the establishment of shared prosperity, which develops as individuals, communities and their institutions acquire the capacities, attitudes and skills that equip them to tackle the main drivers of poverty and human suffering: 'the corruption of human morals and the prevalence of prejudice, suspicion, hatred, untrustworthiness, selfishness and tyranny among men'.

Shared prosperity, then might be defined as a global condition in which every person contributes to the building and maintenance of an ever-advancing, new civilization in which their collective creativity, energy, love, compassion, knowledge, intellects, spiritual and moral values, talents, learning and resources are pooled to provide a just, peaceful, equitable, safe, united, fulfilling, stimulating, beautiful, intelligent, nurturing and learning environment which benefits

everyone, protects and sustains the planet and enables them to live long, healthy, happy, productive lives in service to one another, in love for humanity.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/resources/online-library/ending-poverty-our-generation>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.nation.com.pk/islamabad/09-Jan-2013/un-plan-sought-to-eradicate-extreme-poverty-by-2030>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2013/05/08/shared-prosperity-goal-for-changing-world>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/economic-development-for-shared-prosperity-and-poverty-reduction-a-strategic-framework>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.neweconomyworkinggroup.org/visions/shared-prosperity>

# A Hymn to Love

(*Sáqí, bi-dih ábí*)\*†

Julio Savi

O Cup-Bearer, give me a drop

He is the Glorious

O Cup-Bearer, give me a drop of the mystic Flame, [1]

That it may wash my soul from the whispers of the flesh,

A drop of water revealing the form of Fire,

A sparkle of fire manifesting the celestial Fount.

A glimmer of His image fell on the page of the Soul,

A hundred Hellenic wisdoms were confounded.

A spark of that Flame hit the Tree of Sinai,

A hundred Imranite Moseses were astounded.

A flame of that Fire turned into Love and pitched [5]

Its tents in man's water and clay and in his heart.

Who art Thou, O Love, that 'cause of Thee the world

Is in turmoil and Luqman's wisdom is envious?

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\* For a general introduction to this and other poems by Bahá'u'lláh see Julio Savi, "Bahá'u'lláh's Persian poems written before 1863," in *Lights of Irfan* 13 (2012): 317-361.

† This provisional translation has been done with the precious assistance of Ms. Faezeh Mardani Mazzoli, lecturer of Persian language at the University of Bologna, translated by Julio Savi.

Now Thou boastest: "I'm the Beloved's splendour in the world."

Now Thou proclaimest: "I'm Myself that Divine Countenance."

Since Thou breathest the Beloved's fragrance upon the soul,

Whatever claim Thou advancest, one might say Thou art much better.

Thou art the Companion of the soul, the Sign of the Beloved,

From Thee tranquility of spirit cometh, from Thee distress.

If a ray from Thy Face shineth on the Divine realms, [10]

Thou wilt see a hundred Cananaean Josephs put up for sale.

From Thee Joseph's fragrance bloweth; from Thee the Messianic Spirit;

Thou art the white-handed Moses, Thou, the flame on Mount Paran.

Bound are the heads by Thy locks, pierced the hearts

By Thine anguish, be they of insane laymen or of Divine sages.

I'm drunk of Thee, 'cause of Thee I'm notorious, whether

Thou offerest me a hundred lives, or Thou slayest me.

If Thou art the Angel of death, how come that Thou revivest me?

If Thou art the Reviver of bodies, how is it that Thou actest as a snake?

If Thou graciously movest in the court of a king, Thou changest [15]

The king into a servant and the servant into a king.

A spark of Thy Face fell upon the rose-bush of the soul,

And lit its beauty as a crimson tulip.

O! What a breeze wafted announcing to the soul the glad tidings



That from the East of the Spirit that Divine Face hath  
appeared.

Souls soared with yearning, hearts were enraptured in ecstasy,

Love fell in love with Him, and so did the essence of  
creation.

Through His wisdom, the coincidence of opposites is made  
manifest,

Now Love becometh a servant, now the Intellect a porter.

Stop tearing asunder the veil of mystery, O Dervish:

A cry riseth from the city of men and the world of brutes. [20]

### **A hymn to love: a poem revealed by Bahá'u'lláh**

*Sáqí, bi-dih ábí* is a 20 one rhymed (-*ání*) distiches poem. It is one among eight Persian poems, composed by Bahá'u'lláh, signed “Dervish,” and published by the Iranian Bahá'í scholar ‘Abdu’l-Ḥamíd Ishráq Khávarí (1902–1972) in his multi-volume anthology of the Writings of the Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith *Má'idiy-i-Asmání* (4:176-211). The eight Persian poems quoted by Ishráq Khávarí are as follows:<sup>1</sup>

1. *Báz áv-u bi-dih jámí*, that may be paraphrased as “Come back and proffer a chalice” (qtd. in Ishráq Khávarí 186-7; see also *Majmú'iy-i-Áthár* 30:158-59);<sup>2</sup>
2. *Sáqí az Ghayb-i-Baqá*, that may be paraphrased as “The Cup-bearer of the hidden Realm” (qtd. in Ishráq Khávarí 209-11; see also *Majmú'iy-i-Áthár* 30:157-58);<sup>3</sup>
3. *'Ishq az Sidriy-i-A'lá ámad*, that may be paraphrased as “Love came from the loftiest Tree” (qtd. in Ishráq Khávarí 179-80; see also *Majmú'iy-i-Áthár* 30:172-74);
4. *Bi-Jánán ján hamí dar-yáft rah*, that may be paraphrased as “The soul hath found its way to the Beloved” (qtd. in Ishráq Khávarí 176-8; see also *Majmú'iy-i-Áthár* 30:167-69);

5. *Sáqí, bi-dih ábí zán shu'liy-i-rúḥání*, that may be paraphrased as “O Cup-bearer, give me a drop of the mystic flame” (qtd. In *Ishrâq Khávarí* 192-4; see also *Majmú'iy-i-Áthár* 30:171-72);
6. *Mast-and bulbulán*, that may be paraphrased as “Nightingales get inebriated” (qtd. in *Ishrâq Khávarí* 194-6; see also *Majmú'iy-i-Áthár* 30:169-71);<sup>4</sup>
7. *Saḥar ámad bi bistar-am yár*, that may be paraphrased as “At dawn the Friend came to my bed” (qtd. in *Ishrâq Khávarí* 181-84; see also *Majmú'iy-i-Áthár* 30:163-65);
8. *But-i-má ámad bá baṭṭí-u bádih*, that may be paraphrased as “Our Charmer came with a glass and wine” (qtd. in *Ishrâq Khávarí* 188-92; see also *Majmú'iy-i-Áthár* 30:159-63).

These eight poems are also quoted in *Majmú'iy-i-Áthár* 30:157-74. Excerpts from a few of them are included, together with excerpts from other poems by Bahá'u'lláh, by the Iranian Bahá'í scholar Mírzá Asadu'lláh Fáḍíl Mázarání (ca.1880-1957), in volume 4 of his *Tárikh Zuhuru'l-Ḥaqq* (History of the Manifestation of Truth), a nine volume history of the Bábí and Bahá'í religions (141-2). Two of them are mentioned in the *Bahá'í World* volumes among “Bahá'u'lláh Best Known Works.” They are *Báz Áv-u Bi-Dih Jámí* and *Sáqí az Ghayb-i-Baqá*. Franklin D. Lewis, an expert in Persian Language and Literature, has offered three different translations of *Sáqí az Ghayb-i-Baqá* (“Short Poem” 86-9). Three of these poems are mentioned, and a few verses translated, by Stephen N. Lambden, an English Bahá'í scholar focusing on Shí'í Islam and Qajar Persia, early Shaykhism, the Writings of the Báb, the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, in his “Sinaitic Mysteries” (116-7): *Bí jánán ján hamí daryaft, Sáqí bidih ábí, Mast-and bulbulán*.

## Historical hints

These eight poems were most probably written in Kurdistan, where Bahá'u'lláh remained from 10 April 1854 to 19 March 1856 and, in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words, "*lived in poverty,*" wearing the "*garments . . . of the poor and needy*" and eating the "*food . . . of the indigent and lowly . . .*" (qtd. in GPB124, sec.7, para.42). Lewis writes about them:

The information in *God Passes By*<sup>5</sup> seems to suggest that these poems signed "Dervish" date to the earlier phase of Bahá'u'lláh's residence at Sar-Galú, probably some time between the Spring of 1854 and the Winter of 1854-55. However, we cannot yet completely rule out the possibility that they were composed later, while at the Khálidí lodge in Sulaymáníyyih, or perhaps even in the period shortly after his return to Baghdad. ("Short Poem" 84)

The attribution of their drafting to the years of Bahá'u'lláh's stay in Kurdistan (1854-1856), during which He was in touch with the local Sufi communities, is also upheld by Mázandarání in his *Tárikh-i-Zuhúru'l-Haqq* (4:139). Moreover, this attribution seems confirmed by their *takhalluṣ*, "Dervish," the nom de plume introduced into the final verse of these eight poems according to the use of Persian lyrics. In that period Bahá'u'lláh had adopted the surname of Dervish Muḥammad (see Lewis, "Short Poem" 84). In this paper, we will comment only upon the poem which begins *Sáqí, bi-dih ábí*.

## Literary aspects

As to its form, this specific composition may be defined a poem in the light of the following definition of poetry, given by Lewis as to Nineteenth century Persia: "rhymed speech (*moqafâ*) composed in lines (*bayt / abyât*) following one of the established quantitative meters (*bahr / bohur*) and arranged

according to a particular form” (“Poetry as Revelation” 102). Specifically, *Sáqí, bi-dih ábí* seems a *ghazal*.

As to the *ghazal*, the French Orientalist Régis Blachère (1900–1973), a profound interpreter of the Koran, which he translated into French (1947), writes in the Encyclopaedia of Islam that *ghazal* means “‘song, elegy of love,’ often also ‘the erotico-elegiac genre.’ The term is Arabic, but passed into Persian, Turkish and Urdu and acquired a special sense in these languages.”

The term *ghazal* comes from the Arabic root *ghazala*:

He talked, and acted in an amatory and enticing manner, with a woman, or with women; he practised . . . the talk, and actions, and circumstances, occurring between the lover and the object of love. (Lane 6:39)

And thus the Lane Arabic-English Lexicon defines the word *ghazal* as

The talks, and actions, and circumstances, occurring between the lover and the object of love . . . an inclining to foolish and youthful conduct, or a manifesting of passionate love, and becoming notorious for affections to women . . . talk, and amatory and enticing conduct, with women; or play, sport, dalliance, or wanton conduct, and amorous talk, with women . . . play, sport, or diversion, with women . . . or the talk of young men and [or with] young women: . . . praise of what are apparent of the members of the object of love: or the mention of the days of union and of disunion: or the like thereof. (Lane 6:39)

Blachère explains:

the *ghazal* was . . . a man’s song addressed to a girl; contamination by the noun *ghazál* “gazelle,” from the images and comparisons associated with it, is not perhaps to be excluded (cf. “to make sheep’s eyes”).

Whatever the reason, the idea evoked by the term *ghazal*, like the English “gallantry” and particularly the noun “gallant,” now fallen into disuse, became elaborated in a realm of ideas where there mingle the notions of flirtation, compliments made to a lady, complaints at her coldness or inaccessibility and the description of effeminate languishing attitudes on the part of the lover . . .

As to Persian *ghazals*, Alessandro Bausani (1921-1988), a well-known Italian Islamicist and a deep knower of Persian religiosity, says that

A widely accepted opinion is that the ghazal, an unknown genre in the ancient Arabic poetry, derived from an extrapolation and an autonomous use of the tashbīb [first part] of the qaṣīdè. However it also may be that, without excluding the former hypothesis, the ghazal may have derived from some form of oral, popular autochthonous poetry. (“Letteratura neopersiana” 176)

Bausani also writes that the *ghazal* is “the primary instrument of Persian lyrics” (ibid.). He explains that *qaṣīdihs* and *ghazals* are technically different from one another only for their different “length and different subjects” (ibid.). The former was mainly used in Persia as “an instrument of panegyric or philosophic and moralizing poetry” (ibid.). The latter dealt with “wine, love, springtime and mystics” (ibid. 176). Edward G. Browne (1862-1926), the renowned British Orientalist, also explains: “The *ghazal* differs from the *qaṣīda* mainly in subject and length. The former is generally erotic or mystical, and seldom exceeds ten or a dozen *bayts*; the latter may be a panegyric, or a satire, or it may be didactic, philosophical, religious” (27). While speaking about Persian *ghazals* of the 10th-13th centuries, Bausani also explains that in those centuries the *ghazal* has “as its object the *ma‘shúk* ‘the Beloved,’ whereas the *kaṣīda* has as its object the *mamdúh*, ‘the Praised’

(Prince or patron).” However, he adds, in the period from the 13th to the 16th century “the chief object of the *ghazal*, the *ma‘shúk*, the (earthly) Beloved, becomes inextricably connected not only with the *ma‘búd* [literally, the Adored One], the divine Beloved (God, or better His representative on earth, the mystical Initiator) but even with the *mamdúh* [literally, the Celebrated One], the traditional object of the *kaşída*” (“*Ghazal*. ii. In Persian literature”).

The features of the Persian *ghazals*, as explained by Bausani in the Encyclopaedia of Islam,<sup>6</sup> may be summarized as follows:

1. Length: “it consists of a few *bayts* (verses, or distiches), generally not less than five and no more than twelve” (Bausani). Other authors consider up to 15 verses as acceptable for a *ghazal* (Rossi, *Grammatica* 92). This is true for Khájih Shamsu‘d-Dín Muḥammad Háfiz-i-Shirází (ca.1318-1390), for example, whose *Díván* comprises only two *ghazals* longer than 15 verses. But Mawláná Jalál ad-Dín Rúmí (1207-1273), one of the greatest Persian poets, wrote some *ghazals* that have more than 15 verses, up to 29 couplets. However, all scholars agree that a *ghazal* should be short. It has been defined as “an older Iranian cousin to European sonnets and short odes” (Hilmann, “Háfez and the Persian *ghazal*” G).

2. Rhyme: “It has a single rhyme (often accompanied by a *radíf*); in the first *bayt*, called *maṭla‘*, both hemistichs too rhyme together” (Bausani).

3. Nom de plume: “the last *bayt*, called *maḳta‘*, contains the nom-de-plume (*takhalluş*) of the author” (Bausani).

4. Contents: “the contents of the *ghazal* are descriptions of the emotions of the poet in front of love, spring, wine, God, etc., often inextricably connected” (Bausani).

5. “In classical *ghazal* each verse forms a closed unit, only slightly interconnected with the others. To explain this feature of the *ghazal*, some modern scholars have invoked the ‘psychology of depth’ to show that in the *ghazal* there is unity,

but an unconscious one. However this may be, external incongruity would seem to be a real rule in classic Persian poetry. We are in the presence of a bunch of motifs only lightly tied together” (Bausani). This rule admits exceptions: “If two or more verses belong in sense to each other, they are called *muḵaṭṭa*” (Wilberforce-Clarke xiv).

Finally Wilberforce-Clark remarks about *ghazal*:

The poem must be finished, without defects in rhyme, and pure in language, all obsolete words, or vulgar expressions being avoided. Each verse must convey a complete thought. The verses are strung like pearls on a thread, which makes them a necklace, the value whereof lies in the value of each pearl, not in the thread. (ibid.)

As to the features of the *ghazal* in the times immediately before Bahá’u’lláh, Bausani writes:

The fourth period [of Persian *ghazal*], that of the so-called Indian style (10th/16th to 12th/18th centuries) . . . sees an intellectual reflection on the accepted symbols of the classical *ghazal*, which becomes an arena for a quasi-philosophical exercise of the mind. The *ghazal* finds a renewed congruity of meaning, and its protagonist, instead of the *ma‘shúk/mamdúh/ma‘búd* [that is, the Beloved, the Adored One, the Celebrated One] seems to be the Mind of its Author, creating ever new purely intellectual combinations of the old worn-out symbols. (Bausani)

*Sáqí bi-dih ábí* seems to meet all these requirements, the most important exception being its length: 20 verses. However, as has been said above, both Ḥáfiz and Rúmí wrote some *ghazals* with more than 20 verses. The main reason why this poem can be seen as a *ghazal* is that its central theme is Love. In fact, it may be considered as a hymn to Love, its protagonist. Like the other seven poems which have been mentioned at the beginning

of this paper, *Sáqí bi-dih ábí* seemingly alludes to Bahá'u'lláh's mystic encounter with the Most Great Spirit in the Síyáh-Chál, the subterranean dungeon in Teheran where He was confined from middle August to December 1852, also mentioned in several biographical passages of His Writings. In this poem the Most Great Spirit is described first as Water and Fire, and then as Love itself. Many verses are devoted to a description of Love and of its impact on human hearts and on the world.

### A slow reading of the poem

The following thoughts are offered only as personal reflections on the verses revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, whose perusal may evoke remembrances of His own Writings as well as of verses of earlier poets.

#### 0

*Huva'l-'Azíz*<sup>7</sup>

*He is the Glorious*

The invocation of one of the names of God, usually the name Allah, at the beginning of a script is very frequent in the Islamic world. The invocation *Huv'Alláh* means He is God. Francis Joseph Steingass (1825–1903), the German linguist expert on Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit who authored a well-known Persian-English dictionary, writes about *Huva*, in Arabic *huwa*, and in Persian also *hú*:

He; he is; a name of God;—also *hú'i náma*, The name of God, generally accompanied by one or more of his attributes, written in front of a letter or book as an auspicious omen . . . (Steingass 1516)

As to *Alláh*, Steingass writes: “God: The God, by way of eminence (being compounded of the article *al*, The, and *iláh*, a God)” (Steingass 95). The invocation appears at the beginning of a



few of Bahá'u'lláh's Writings, both in poetry, as for example in *Báz áv-u bi-dih jámí*, and *'Ishq az Sidriy-i-A'lá ámad*, and in prose. The Tablets translated into English which begin with this invocation comprise *Ishráqát*, *Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd*, a Tablet quoted by Bahá'u'lláh in *Súriy-i-Haykal: Lawḥ-i-Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh* (108-11, paras.210-4), a Tablet quoted in *Fire and Light* (16, no. VII), the Tablet to Badí' (qtd. in Balyuzi, *King of Glory* 299), a prayer (qtd. in BP43-5) and section 106 of "Questions and Answers" (139-40).

About the invocation "He is God," 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote:

*Thou hast asked regarding the phrase, "He is God!" written above the Tablets. By this word it is intended that no one hath any access to the Invisible Essence. The way is barred and the road is impassable. In this world all men must turn their faces toward "Him-whom God-shall-Manifest." He is the "Dawning-place of Divinity" and the "Manifestation of Deity." He is the "Ultimate Goal," the "Adored One" of all and the "Worshipped One" of all. Otherwise, whatever flashes through the mind is not that Essence of essences and the Reality of realities; nay, rather it is pure imagination woven by man and is surrounded, not the surrounding. Consequently, it returns finally to the realm of supposition and conjectures. (TAB3:485)*

Taherzadeh wrote in this regard, that whenever Bahá'u'lláh quotes the Koranic verse: "There is none other God but God" at the beginning of a Tablet, He:

proclaims in majestic and powerful language that in this day He has removed the letter of negation which had been placed before that of affirmation. This phrase, which the Prophet of Islam regarded as the cornerstone of His Faith, is now in the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh symbolically replaced by the affirmative phrase "He is God." This signifies that the Author of this Faith holds within His own hands the reins of authority, and, unlike

the Dispensations of the past, no one will have the power to wrest it from Him. Hence the assurance in His Writings that this is “the Day which shall not be followed by night.” (160)

In this poem Bahá’u’lláh mentions God’s attribute *al-‘Azíz*, “Excellent; precious, dear, valuable, rare, choice; magnificent, glorious, powerful; venerable, pious, holy; a king, ruler, prime minister (especially in Egypt)” (Steingass 848). This adjective has been translated “the Glorious.” It is the ninth among the ninety-nine beautiful Names of God that Moslem theologians have found in the Koran. In the Bahá’í Writings it has been translated the “*Mightiest*” (Bahá’u’lláh, qtd. in BP92, Long Healing Prayer; Nafahat-i Faql 2:17, Lawḥ-i-Anta’l-Káfi).

1

*Sáqí, bi-dih ábí zán shu‘liy-i-rúḥání,*

*Tá kih bi-shúyad ján-rá az vasvasiy-i-nafsání,*

*O Cup-bearer, give me a drop of the mystic Flame,*

*That it may wash my soul from the whispers of the flesh,*

Bahá’u’lláh here addresses His Beloved, perhaps the Most Great Spirit, Whom He had seen as a Maid, calling Him Cup-Bearer. This familiar personage of Persian mystic poetry has his origin in the Koran and in the Traditions. Bausani explains that Sufis relate the cup-bearer to “the ancient mystic legend wherefore at the beginning of the Divine Love, the cup-bearer (*sáqí*), as God-the Beloved, poured the wine for God-the Lover during forty successive dawns and thus he created the world” (“Letteratura neopersiana” 162; see *Religion in Iran* 277). According to the German Orientalist Annemarie Schimmel (1922–2003), Sufis

saw this moment in poetical imagery as a spiritual banquet in which the wine of Love was distributed to humanity so that everyone received the share which he or she will have in this life. Here, the imagery of wine is

used not for the final goal of the mystic's unification with God and his being filled with Him, but rather as the starting point of the flow of Divine grace at the beginning of time. (*Deciphering* 109)

It is the *rúz-i-alast*, the metahistorical morning when human souls entered into the eternal Covenant with their Creator, which is the basis of their life on earth and of the development of human civilization (see HW, Persian, no.19). Carlo Saccone, an expert in and a translator of Persian poetry into Italian, comprising the whole *Díván* by Ḥáfiz, writes in this regard that

the wine which he [the cup-bearer], incessantly invoked and implored, pours into the cup of the lover\poet clearly reveals its sacred *imprinting*, i.e., it is a transposition of the "mysterious" wine which the youthful cup-bearers of Muslim paradise offer to the blessed spirits. (44)

According to Saccone, the cup-bearer sometimes symbolizes the beloved himself, as

an initiator, i.e., he who . . . initiates the poet . . . into the mysteries of wine and love for him [God]. [And the poet's] initiation . . . is essentially a summon to folly, to disarm one's intellect and its analytic processes, because the lover will attain unto the reunion with his friend . . . only in the condition of "sacred folly," fostered by his drunkenness. (*ibid.* 49, 50)

A poem by Rúmí also begins with an invocation to the *sáqí* and a request of wine:

Happy-cheeked *sáqí* of mine, give the cup (*jám*) like the pomegranate blossom (*gulnár*); if for my sake you will not give for the sake of the heart of the Beloved (*Yár*). (*Mystical Poems* 2:70, no.290, v.1; *Díván*, "Ghazalyát," no.2283)

In *Sáqí, bi-dih ábí*, the lover asks the Cup-Bearer to give him a drop of the Mystic flame, combining three images: water, *ábí*, here translated “drop,” wine (the Cup-Bearer), and fire, *shu‘lih*, “Light, splendour, lustre, shining, flashing, coruscation; blaze, flash, fire, flame” (Steingass 747). These three images are often associated in Persian mystical poetry. Bausani writes that in Persian literature “the wine is also fire, and in this it is similar to the alchemists’ water, which is also fire . . . In fact in traditional lyric poetry the Wine is often called ‘water’ and compared to the ‘Water of Life’ (*âb-i haivân*)” (*Religion in Iran* 272).

In the second hemistich the lover explains why he wants a drop of the mystical flame: he wants to cleanse his soul from the whispers of the flesh. Bahá’u’lláh uses two images: the whispers and the flesh. As to the Koranic image of the whispers, *vasvasih*, “Inspiring, suggesting (one’s own mind or Satan); a suggestion; instinct; fear, anxiety; conscience; temptation” (Steingass 1468), translated by Shoghi Effendi as “*whisper*” (*Lawḥ-i Dhabih* 246, para.13; *Muntakhabátí* 157), the image of “the whispers of the flesh (*vasvasiy-i-nafsáni*)” comes from the Koran:

*In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.  
Say: I betake me for refuge to the Lord of Men, The  
King of men, The God of men, Against the mischief of  
the stealthily withdrawing whisperer (al-waswási), Who  
whispereth in man’s breast—Against djinn and men.  
(114:1-6, Rodwell)*

This image is also used by mystical poets. Ḥáfiz writes:

In love’s path (*râh-i-‘ishq*) Ahriman’s<sup>8</sup> temptations (*vasvasiy-i-Ahriman*) are many:

Sense keep; and to Surúsh’s<sup>9</sup> message the ear of the heart  
put. (*Díván* 744, “*Ghazalyát*,” no.444, v.6; *Divan* 411, no.398,  
v.2)

Bahá’u’lláh uses the same image in other passages, as for example:

*Keep us safe, then, through Thine unfailing protection, O Thou the Beloved of the entire creation and the Desire of the whole universe, from them whom Thou hast made to be the manifestations of the Evil Whisperer, who whispers (yuwaswisúna) in men's breasts (şudúru'n-nás). (PM233, sec.144, para.2; Munáját 156)*

*Know verily that Knowledge is of two kinds: Divine and Satanic. The one welletth out from the fountain of divine inspiration; the other is but a reflection of vain and obscure thoughts. The source of the former is God Himself; the motive-force of the latter the whisperings of selfish desire (vasávas-i-nafsání). (K169, para.76; KMI53)*

*Sharp must be thy sight, O Dhabih, and adamant thy soul, and brass-like thy feet, if thou wishest to be unshaken by the assaults of the selfish desires that whisper (vasávis) in men's breasts. (GWB245-6, sec. CXV, para.13)*

*. . . in whose soul (nafs) Satan (Shaytán) hath whispered (waswasa) (qtd. in GPB141, sec.8, para.30)<sup>10</sup>*

The Evil Whisperer, mentioned by Bahá'u'lláh and in the Koran (*al-waswási*) and related by Bahá'u'lláh to Satan (*shaytán*), seems to be the human lower nature personified as Satan, a nature to which Bahá'u'lláh refers as “*the Satan of self (shaytán-i-nafs)*” (KI112; KMI84). This lower nature is our ego, that is proud of itself and pretends to be self-sufficient. It is the “serpent” that seduced Eve in the Garden of Eden. The Bible says: “*Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made*” (Genesis 3:1 KJB). The Hebrew word used to refer to the serpent in this verse is *nâchâsh*, from the verb *nâchash*, “to hiss, i.e. whisper” (Strong, “A Concise Dictionary” 78, no.5172). In one of His talks ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained that “*the evil spirit, Satan or whatever is interpreted as evil, refers to the lower nature in man*” (PUP294). He explained the same concept in a Letter in which He

mentions certain friends that had asked Him advice on material aspects of their lives. He is reported to have answered:

*Tell them they should do as they think best in these matters. Should they marry, divorce, leave their homes, move to other places, etc.,—all these matters pertaining to their material affairs—Abdul Baha says:*

*“They must do as they wish; they must solve their own problems; they are grown-ups. We do not like to tell people what they should do in these matters. My work is universal; my time and thoughts are for the whole world on the most important problems relating to affairs that concern the spiritual welfare of nations and individuals. When the believers are insistent, Abdul Baha must give them answers, and it is their wish always that Abdul Baha grants them. He knows what their wish in reality is. They must make mistakes to learn, and to unfold the higher which is within themselves. The initial wish does not come from Abdul Baha. It comes from them. It is generally clothed with such words as these: ‘We only wish to do that which Abdul Baha wishes us to do.’ And they are sincere in this, for they do not know the subtlety of the ego of man. It is the Tempter (the subtle serpent of the mind), and the poor soul not entirely emancipated from its suggestions is deceived until entirely severed from all save God.”* (qtd. in *Baha’i Scriptures* 487, sec.936)

As to the flesh, the adjective *nafsání*, “Lewd, sensual; spiritual, vital” (Steingass 1416), derives from *nafs*, that sometimes in Persian corresponds to that which we call flesh, in the sense of the weak side of man, that side which indulges to sin. Muşlih ad-Dín Sa’dí (ca.1184–1291) writes.

How will know the truth of love (*ḥaqíqat-i-‘ishq*) he who is subjected to the passions of the flesh (*haváy-i-nafsání*)? (“*Ghazalyát*,” no.610, v.8)

Bahá'u'lláh writes in His Lawh-i-Laylatu'l-Quds: “*Burn away, wholly for the sake of the Well-Beloved (al-Maḥbúb), the veil of self (ḥujubát-i-nafsániyyih)*” (316, para.1; Muntakhabátí 203). In the Seven Valleys He mentions “*the veils of the Satanic self (ḥijáb-háy-i-nafs-i-shayṭání)*” (SV7; Haft Vádí 102) that must be burnt by the fire of love so that the mystical seeker may enter the Valley of Knowledge (SV12). This is one of the main functions of the mystic wine, the Word of God, assisting the soul to proceed from the stage of the *nafs-i-ammarih*, the commanding soul, or the insistent self, to higher stages of her spiritual evolution.

## 2

*Zán áb kaz-ú shud śurat-i-átash paydá,*

*Zán nár kaz-ú záhir án Kawthar-i-Rúḥání.*

*A drop of water revealing the form of Fire,*

*A sparkle of fire manifesting the celestial Fount.*

The combination of wine, fire and water continues in the second distich. The first hemistich identifies wine, here called water, *áb*, and fire—*átash*, in the first hemistich and *nár* in the second. Wine is fire, because it is conducive to the intoxication of love that burns away, as a fire, the veils of the Satanic self. The fire of wine also is the celestial Fount (*kawthar-i-rúḥání*), because wine also is water of life, that is the Word of God. The word *Kawthar* (literally, abundance) is mentioned in Súra 108, “*Truly we have given thee an abundance*” (108:1, Rodwell). Edward William Lane (1801-1876), the leading British Arabicist scholar who authored the monumental *Arabic-English Lexicon*, describes *Kawthar* as “A certain river in paradise . . . from which flow all the [other] river thereof . . . pertaining specially to the Prophet, described as being whiter than milk and sweeter than honey and as having its margin composed of pavilions of hollowed pearls” (Lane 7:122). The word has a connotation of abundance, because it derives from the Arabic root *kithara*, “It

was, or became, much, copious, abundant, many, numerous, great in number or quantity; it multiplied; it accumulated” (Lane 7:121). It is the Water of Life, a recurrent motif of both Sufi literature and Bahá’í Writings. In the first case it has mythical and legendary connotations, in the second it is a poetic image to describe mostly the Words of the Manifestation of God and their regenerating power.

## 3

*Yik jilvih<sup>11</sup> zi<sup>12</sup> ‘aks-ash bar safhiy-i-Ján uftád,  
Válih shud<sup>13</sup> az án jilvih sad hikmat-i-Yúnání.*

*A glimmer of His image fell on the page of the Soul,  
A hundred Hellenic wisdoms were confounded.*

The “glimmer (*jilvih*) of His image” is the unveiling of the Beloved. This is one of the meanings of the word *jilvih*, “Presenting a bride to her husband adorned and unveiled; the meeting of the bride and bridegroom; the nuptial bed; the bridal ornaments; splendour, lustre, effulgence, transfiguration” (Steingass 369). However here it has been translated “glimmer” following the example of Shoghi Effendi who translated it as “splendour” (SWAB32, sec.15).

The “page of the Soul (*safhiy-i-Ján*)” is another typical image of Sufi poetry. Rúmí mentions in his *Mathnaví* an equivalent locution, “the leaf (surface) of the heart (*varaq-i-dil*).” *Varaq* means “A leaf of a tree or of paper; paper cut out into any shape” (Steingass 1464). He writes:

God hath given thee the polishing instrument (*şayqal*),  
Reason (*‘aql*), to the end thereby the leaf (surface) of the  
heart (*varaq-i-dil*) may be made resplendent. (4:2475)

It is the soul, here compared to a page, reflecting the Beauty of the Beloved. This verse by Rúmí also mentions a “polishing instrument (*şayqal*), Reason (*‘aql*).” A “polishing instrument” is



also mentioned in the Valley of Love: “A pure heart is as a mirror; cleanse it with the burnish of love (şayqal-i-ḥubb) and severance from all save God, that the true sun may shine within it and the eternal morning dawn” (SV21; Haft Vâdî 113). This first hemistich is reminiscent of the words of Genesis:

*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.* (Genesis 1:26)

It also is reminiscent of the following Tradition:

God created Adam in His image (*kḥalaqa Allāh ādama ‘alā şúratihī*). (qtd. in Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions* 188; Furúzánfar no.595)

It finally reminds us of the Aristotelian “tabula rasa,” the *unscribed tablet*.<sup>14</sup> The soul is seemingly described as a page upon which the beauteous features of the Face of the Lord can be drawn.

The second hemistich hints at the impotence of philosophy, the “hundred Hellenic wisdoms,” and thus of the human intellect, when it is not assisted by Revelation. This concept was later on developed by Bahá’u’lláh in His *Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat*, in which He states that Greece was “a Seat of Wisdom for a prolonged period” (149-50). Then He adds:

*Although it is recognized that the contemporary men of learning are highly qualified in philosophy, arts and crafts, yet were anyone to observe with a discriminating eye he would readily comprehend that most of this knowledge hath been acquired from the sages of the past [i.e. the Greek philosophers], for it is they who have laid the foundation of philosophy, reared its structure and reinforced its pillars . . . The sages aforetime acquired their knowledge from the Prophets, inasmuch as the latter were the Exponents of divine philosophy and the Revealers of heavenly mysteries. Men quaffed the*

*crystal, living waters of Their utterance, while others satisfied themselves with the dregs. Everyone receiveth a portion according to his measure . . . The essence and the fundamentals of philosophy have emanated from the Prophets. That the people differ concerning the inner meanings and mysteries thereof is to be attributed to the divergence of their views and minds.* (144-5, comment in brackets added)

## 4

*Yik jadhvīh az án shu‘lih bar Sidriy-i-Síná zad,  
Madhúsh az án jadhvīh şad Músíy-i-‘Imrání.*

*A spark of that flame hit the Tree of Sinai,  
A hundred Imranite Moseses were astounded.*

This distich refers to the story of Moses, the Burning Bush and Moses’s swoon when God showed Himself to Him. Fire seems here identified with the Most Great Spirit. Lambden comments upon this verse as follows:

So powerful is the fiery “water” of the stunning Divine Cupbearer (*sáqí*) that but a “firebrand” (*jadhwa*) ignited from its flame in the Sinaitic Lote-Tree would suffice to throw one hundred Imranite Moseses into a state of bewildered astonishment. (116)

Moses is called Imranite from the name, Imran, which Muslim tradition ascribes to His father, called Amran in the Bible (Exodus 6:20).

## 5

*Yik shu‘lih az án átaşh şhud, ‘Ishq<sup>15</sup> bi-zad khar-gáh  
Dar áb-u gil-i-ádam ham dar dil-i-insání.*

*A flame burst out from that fire and Love pitched*

*Its tent in man's water and clay and in his heart.*

This distich refers to the legend that man is moulded of water and clay, mentioned by many Persian poets. For example Rúmi writes in this vein in his Mathnaví:

Where were we when the Judge of Judgement (Day) was sowing reason ('*aq̄l*) in the water and clay ('*ab-u t̄ín*) of Adam? (6:3134)

Bahá'u'lláh also uses this image in later Writings:

*He must purge his breast, which is the sanctuary of the abiding love of the Beloved, of every defilement, and sanctify his soul from all that pertaineth to water and clay (áb-u-gil), from all shadowy and ephemeral attachments. (K1192; KMI149)*

*Ye are even as the bird which soareth, with the full force of its mighty wings and with complete and joyous confidence, through the immensity of the heavens, until, impelled to satisfy its hunger, it turneth longingly to the water and clay (áb-u-gil) of the earth below it, and, having been entrapped in the mesh of its desire, findeth itself impotent to resume its flight to the realms whence it came. (Lawḥ-i-Aḥmad bi-Fársí 327, para.6; Muntakhabátí 210)*

*I fear lest, bereft of the melody of the dove of heaven, ye will sink back to the shades of utter loss, and, never having gazed upon the beauty of the rose, return to water and clay (áb-u gil). (HW, Persian, no.13; Ad'iyiyih 428)*

Elsewhere Bahá'u'lláh uses the Arabic word *má'*, water, in the place of the Persian *áb*, and the word *turáb*, "ground, earth, dust" (Steingass 291), in the place of *gil*:

*Magnified be Thy name, O Lord my God! I know not what the water (má') is with which Thou hast created*

*me, or what the fire (nár) Thou hast kindled within me,  
or the clay (turáb) wherewith Thou hast kneaded me.*

(PM12, sec.9, para.1, Munáját 12)

This distich seemingly explains that the bestowal of Spirit (Fire) introduces love into the nature of man (his water and clay), and his heart. In this regard, it seems that spirit is the same as love. In this vein, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states: “*love is the cause of the existence of all phenomena*” (PUP255) and also: “*The greatest power in the realm and range of human existence is spirit—the divine breath which animates and pervades all things*” (PUP58). Love and spirit are described as two similar powers, on which the whole existence has its foundations. Indeed, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá reportedly said:

*the first principle of God, Love, is the creative principle. Love is an outpour from God, and is pure spirit.* (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, qtd. in *Bahá’í Scriptures* 300, no.609)

This distich seemingly says that love permeates both the water and clay of man, and his heart. The locution “water and clay” seems an image denoting human flesh, the element whereby man is a weak creature. As to the heart, in the Sufi world, the heart is, first, the organ of the inner knowledge of transcendent reality that Sufis call *ma‘rifa*. Second, it is the seat of the divine presence. And, third, it is the organ that is attracted towards what is other than it (see Savi, 51-3). Therefore this distich could denote that through the bestowals of Spirit love takes possession of man as a whole. This distich is reminiscent of a *ghazal* by Ḥafiz that says:

(O true beloved!) in eternity without beginning (the day of  
*miṣák*),<sup>16</sup> of glory, the splendour-ray of Thy beauty  
boasted.

Revealed became love; and, upon all the world, fire dashed.

(O absolute existence!) Thy face displayed splendour; (and)  
 beheld (that) the angel had no (capacity for) love:

From this (exceeding) jealousy, it became the essence of  
 fire; and upon Ādam dashed.

From that torch (of love), reason wished to kindle its lamp,  
 Jealousy's lightning flashed; and in confusion, the world  
 dashed.

The adversary (Shaiṭán)<sup>17</sup> sought to come to the spectacle-  
 place of the mystery (of love):

The invisible hand (of God) came, and, at the heart of the  
 excluded one (Shaiṭán), dashed.

Others, all on ease, dashed the dice of partition (fate):

Our grief-experienced heart it was that also, on grief (the  
 dice of fate) cast.

The desire of thy chin's dimple (thy mysteries) possessed the  
 lofty soul:

At the ring of that tress, curt with curl, (his) hand, he  
 dashed.

The joy-book of love for Thee, Ḥáfiz wrote on that day,

When, on the head of the chattels of his joyous heart, the  
 reed (of cancellation), he dashed. (*Díván* 354-55,  
 "Ghazalyát," no.186; *Divan* 158-9, no.152)

## 6

*Ay 'Ishq, chih í Tú, kaz Tú jahán pur áshúb,*

*Ham az Tú dar ámad ḥasrat<sup>18</sup> dar ḥikmat-i-Luqmání.*

*Who art Thou, O Love, that 'cause of Thee the world,  
 Is in turmoil and Luqman's wisdom is envious?*

The world of love is the world of paradoxes. No wonder that love throws the word into turmoil, *áshúb*, “Terror, dread, fear; grief, affliction, misfortune; confusion, discord, disturbance, tumult, riot, sedition” (Steingass 67). Bahá’u’lláh writes in the Seven Valleys:

*Love setteth a world aflame at every turn, and he wasteth every land where he carrieth his banner. Being hath no existence in his kingdom; the wise wield no command within his realm. The leviathan of love swalloweth the master of reason and destroyeth the lord of knowledge. He drinketh the seven seas, but his heart’s thirst is still unquenched, and he saith, “Is there yet any more?” He shunneth himself and draweth away from all on earth. (SV10)*

In the world of love many things turn upside down. It is this reversal that arises the feeling of wonderment in the lovers. Bahá’u’lláh says about wonderment: “*How many a mystic tree hath this whirlwind of wonderment (ḥayrat) snatched by the roots, how many a soul hath it exhausted*” (SV31; Haft Vádí 124).

As to turmoil, one remembers at this point the tumultuous events, whose protagonist or spectator Bahá’u’lláh had just been: the Conference of Badasht in June 1848, the Mázindarán upheaval, with the battle of the Fort of Shaykh Ṭabarsí, that began in late summer of 1848 and ended in the spring of 1849, the slaughter of the Sevens Martyrs of Teheran in February 1850, the upheaval of Nayríz, in the late spring of 1850, the massacre that followed the attempt on the life of the Shah on 15 August 1852 . . . Iran had really been in turmoil.

And yet the folly of love conceals a great wisdom, a wisdom for which even Luqman, the legendary sage mentioned in the Koran (31:11-8), that in post-Koranic literature is described as a fabulist, a Muslim Aesop (see Savi 202-3), becomes full of envy. The folly of love is the wisdom of the person that has become detached from the water and clay of the world and has placed

all his affections on the eternal world, wherefrom his soul comes and whereto she is returning. While so doing, this person gives a meaning to each instant of her life, that she does not live in the superficiality of its contingent and ephemeral meanings, but in the inner depth of the Absolute that transpires thereof. All this, as poetical and mystic as it is, is taught by Bahá'u'lláh in an extremely rational and practical way. This transparency of absolute appears in the actions of a human beings, whenever he is prompted by the sincere intention of serving humankind to promote its ever-advancing civilization.

## 7

*Gáh kuní da 'ví kih Man-am jilviy-i-Maḥbúb bi 'álam.*

*Gáh gúy kih Man-am khúd án Ṭal'at-i-Subḥání.*

*Now Thou boastest: "I am the Beloved's splendour in the world."*

*Now Thou proclaimest: "I'm Myself that Divine Countenance."*

In this verse begins a description of Love, in its various aspects, each of which conveys a mystical meaning.

Love is "the Beloved's splendour in the world (*jilviy-i-Maḥbúb bi 'álam*)." This sentence is reminiscent of words written and uttered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

*Know thou of a certainty that Love is the secret of God's holy Dispensation, the manifestation of the All-Merciful, the fountain of spiritual outpourings. Love is heaven's kindly light, the Holy Spirit's eternal breath that vivifieth the human soul. Love is the cause of God's revelation unto man, the vital bond inherent, in accordance with the divine creation, in the realities of things. (SWAB27, sec.12)*

*Know thou, the first bounty from the True One is love, unity and harmony, and without these all the deeds pass in vain and give no result. Love is the result of the Manifestation and the glorious purpose of the rising of Light on the Mount, in the Sinai of the Forgiving Lord.* (TAB1:183-4)

*Love is the first effulgence of Divinity . . .* (PUP338)

*Love is, in reality, the first effulgence of Divinity and the greatest splendor of God.* (PUP397)

*Love is the breath of the Holy Spirit in the heart of Man.* (PT20, sec.6, para.12)

Love is the “*Divine Countenance* (Ṭal‘at-i-Subḥání).” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes about the word “face:”

*The word “face” (vajh) hath many meanings, among which there is submissiveness to the Will of God (riḍá), as God, exalted be He, says: “Seeking His Face” [Koran 6:52], and also: “We feed you for the sake of God alone” [Koran 76:9], and moreover His good-pleasure (riḍá). And the face also means the Essence (ḍhát). God, exalted be He, says: “Everything . . . will perish except His own Face” [Koran 28:88]. And the face (vajh) also means the unveiling (jilwat). God, exalted be He, says: “whithersoever ye turn, there is the Presence of God” [Koran 2:115]. And the face (vajh) hath various interpretations and allusions, beside what hath been said. However, due to lack of time, it hath been chosen not to expatiate on the subject. On the basis of all this, submission (taslím) of the face [of the believer] is one of the special virtues of the righteous and of the greatest gifts of the free. Whosoever is so aided is graciously favored with absolute faith in the highest level of certitude and assurance. (Makátib 1:396)<sup>19</sup>*



‘Abdu’l-Bahá has repeatedly stated that “*God is Love*” (PUP158), and has explained that “*Christ has said God is Love*” (PT192, sec.58, para.2), possibly referring to the following verses:

*He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. (1 John 4:8, KJV)*

*God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. (1 John 4:16, KJV)*

‘Abdu’l-Bahá has also hinted at this concept in various other contexts. He is quoted as stating:

*God is Love and Peace. God is Truth. God is Omniscience. God is without beginning and without end. God is uncreated and uncreating, yet the Source, the Causeless Cause. God is pure Essence, and cannot be said to be anywhere or in any place. (qtd. in Bahá’í Scriptures 300, no.609)*

*God is love; God seeketh fellowship, purity, sanctity and long-suffering; these are the attributes of Divinity. (PUP290)*

*For God is love, and all phenomena find source and emanation in that divine current of creation. The love of God haloes all created things. Were it not for the love of God, no animate being would exist. (PUP315)*

## 8

*Chún az Tú vazad bar ján rá’ihiy-i-Jánán,*

*Bar har chih kuní da ‘ví gúyad<sup>20</sup> kih bih az ání.*

*Since Thou breathest the Beloved’s fragrance upon the soul,  
Whatever claim Thou advancest, one might say Thou art  
much greater.*

Love sheds “*the Beloved’s fragrance upon the soul* (bar ján rá’ihiy-i-Jánán).” The image of perfume is widely used in Sufi literature. We remember here that the fragrance of the Beloved is a symbol of His bounties. Love brings the bounties of the Beloved. Whatever bounty He bestows, it is but a reflection of the Beauty of God. In this vein Bahá’u’lláh writes:

*O My Well-Beloved! Thou hast breathed Thy Breath into Me, and divorced Me from Mine own Self. Thou didst, subsequently, decree that no more than a faint reflection, a mere emblem of Thy Reality within Me be left among the perverse and envious.* (GWB89, sec. XL, para.1)

*These sanctified Mirrors, these Day-springs of ancient glory are one and all the Exponents on earth of Him Who is the central Orb of the universe, its Essence and ultimate Purpose. From Him proceed their knowledge and power; from Him is derived their sovereignty. The beauty of their countenance is but a reflection of His image, and their revelation a sign of His deathless glory.* (KI99-100, para.106)

The Manifestation of God, the apex of the spiritual hierarchy in the world, is Himself but a reflection of the Beauty of God. And yet, the Manifestation of God is “*the Supreme Goal* (maqṣad-aqṣá) *and Most Sublime Summit* (dhurviy-i-‘ulyá)” (ESW147; Lawḥ-i Mubárah-i-khaṭáb 96), “*the world’s Ultimate Desire* (gháyat-i-quṣvá), *the Summit* (dhurviy-i-‘ulyá) *and Day Spring of Glory* (ufuq-i-a‘lá)” (GWB345, sec. CLXIV, para.7; Muntakhabátí 221).

## 9

*Ham Mú’nis-i-jání, ham Áiy<sup>21</sup>-i-Jánání,*

*Ham jam‘iyat-i-ján-há az Tú,<sup>22</sup> ham az Tú paríshání.*

*Thou art the Companion of the soul, the Sign of the Beloved,*

*From Thee tranquillity of spirit cometh, from Thee distress.*

Love is “*the Companion (mú’nis) of the soul.*” *Mú’nis* means “A companion, intimate friend; a solacer, comforter” (Steingass 1349). Bahá’u’lláh turns to God using this Name in many prayers, as for example:

*I implore Thee, O Thou Who art the beloved Companion (mú’nis) of Bahá . . .* (PM15, sec.13, para.2; Munáját 16)

*I beseech Thee, O Thou Who art my Companion (mú’nisi) in my lowliness . . .* (PM16, sec.14, par. 2; Munáját 16)

*Let Thine everlasting melodies breathe tranquillity on me, O my Companion (mú’nisi) . . .* (PM248, sec.155, para.1; Munáját 167)

Love is “*the Sign of the Beloved (Áyiy-i-Jánání).*” *Áyih* means “A mark, a sign; a miracle; a verse of the Qur’án; (met.) an accomplished master” (Steingass 128). Bahá’u’lláh writes in His Lawḥ-i-Hadí:

*From the exalted source, and out of the essence of His favor and bounty He hath entrusted every created thing with a sign (áyih) of His knowledge (‘irfán), so that none of His creatures may be deprived of its share in expressing, each according to its capacity and rank, this knowledge. This sign (áyih) is the mirror of His beauty in the world of creation. The greater the effort exerted for the refinement of this sublime and noble mirror, the more faithfully will it be made to reflect the glory of the names and attributes of God, and reveal the wonders of His signs and knowledge. Every created thing will be enabled (so great is this reflecting power) to reveal the potentialities of its pre-ordained station, will recognize*

*its capacity and limitations, and will testify to the truth that “He, verily, is God; there is none other God besides Him.” . . . (262, para.2; Muntakhabátí 168)*

And ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains:

*. . . all the divine Manifestations suffered, offered their lives and blood, sacrificed their existence, comfort and all they possessed for the sake of mankind. Therefore consider how much they love. Were it not for their love for humanity, spiritual love would be mere nomenclature. Were it not for their illumination, human souls would not be radiant. How effective is their love! This is a sign of the love of God; a ray of the Sun of Reality. (PUP257)*

Love brings tranquillity and distress. It is another of the many paradoxes characterizing the condition of love. A lover achieves tranquillity because he discovered “*the Beloved (al-Maḥbúb) of his heart, and the Object of his desire (al-Madhkúr)*” (PM108, sec.66, para.9; Munáját 78). However, his heart also is distressed, because the lover is aware of his ideal remoteness from the Beloved, and of his meanness, and also because he longs for spiritual growth and self-sacrifice. As Bahá’u’lláh writes:

*Though my body be pained by the trials that befall me from Thee, though it be afflicted by the revelations of Thy Decree, yet my soul rejoiceth at having partaken of the waters of Thy Beauty, and at having attained the shores of the ocean of Thine eternity. Doth it beseem a lover<sup>23</sup> to flee from his beloved (al-maḥbúb), or to desert the object of his heart’s desire (ma‘ashúq)? Nay, we all believe in Thee, and eagerly hope to enter Thy presence. (PM96, sec.60, para.3; Munáját 70)*

## 10

*Gar partawí az Rúy-at dar Mişr-i-Ilah<sup>24</sup> árand,  
Bíní bi-kharídárí şad Yúsuf-i-Kan'ání.*

*If a ray from Thy Face shineth on the Divine realms,<sup>25</sup>  
Thou wilt see a hundred Cananaean Josephs put up for  
sale.*

This distich refers to the story of Joseph, son of Jacob, sold as a slave by his brothers and, after many vicissitudes, become viceroy of Egypt. Here the Face of the Beloved matches the beautiful Joseph. Whenever a ray of the face of the Beloved shines in the realm of love, it is as if a hundred Josephs were put up for sale.

## 11

*Ham búy-i-qamış az Tú, ham Rúh-i-Masíh az Tú,  
Ham Musíy-i-baydá'í, ham şu'liy-i-Farání.*

*From Thee Joseph's fragrance<sup>26</sup> bloweth; from Thee the  
Messianic Spirit;*

*Thou art the white-handed Moses, Thou, the flame on  
Mount Paran.*

Love is successively identified with Joseph, described through the image of the scent of his garment (*qamış*); with Jesus, described through two among His attributes known in the Moslem world, Spirit and His Messianic Station; and Moses, described through the image of His white hand and of the Burning Bush. In later Writings Bahá'u'lláh identified Himself with all these three Personages. As to Joseph, Bahá'u'lláh describes Him as a “*Prophet (nabí)*” together with “*Jesus, Moses . . . and Muḥammad*” (KI254, para.282; KMI197), and writes about Him:

*Dust fill your mouths, and ashes blind your eyes, for having bartered away the Divine Joseph for the most paltry of prices.* (GWB208, sec. CIII, para.4)

As to Moses, He writes in His Súriy-i-Damm:

*Praise be to Thee, O Lord My God, for the wondrous revelations of Thy inscrutable decree and the manifold woes and trials Thou hast destined for Myself. At one time Thou didst deliver Me into the hands of Nimrod [Abraham]; at another Thou hast allowed Pharaoh's rod to persecute Me [Moses] . . .* (88, para.1, added terms in brackets)

As to Jesus, He writes:

*Again I was crucified for having unveiled to men's eyes the hidden gems of Thy glorious unity, for having revealed to them the wondrous signs of Thy sovereign and everlasting power [Jesus].* (Súriy-i-Damm 88, para.1, added terms in brackets)

*O Jews! If ye be intent on crucifying once again Jesus, the Spirit of God, put Me to death, for He hath once more, in My person, been made manifest unto you.* (GWB101, sec. XLVII, para.1)

This distich seems to foreshadow the concept of the “essential unity” of the Messengers of God later on explained in greater details:

*These Manifestations of God have each a twofold station. One is the station of pure abstraction and essential unity. In this respect, if thou callest them all by one name, and dost ascribe to them the same attribute, thou hast not erred from the truth. Even as He hath revealed: “No distinction do We make between any of His Messengers!” For they one and all summon the*

*people of the earth to acknowledge the Unity of God, and herald unto them the Kawthar of an infinite grace and bounty. They are all invested with the robe of Prophethood, and honoured with the mantle of glory. Thus hath Muḥammad, the Point of the Qur'án, revealed: "I am all the Prophets." Likewise, He saith: "I am the first Adam, Noah, Moses, and Jesus." Similar statements have been made by 'Alí. Sayings such as this, which indicate the essential unity of those Exponents of Oneness, have also emanated from the Channels of God's immortal utterance, and the Treasuries of the gems of divine knowledge, and have been recorded in the scriptures. These Countenances are the recipients of the Divine Command, and the day-springs of His Revelation. This Revelation is exalted above the veils of plurality and the exigencies of number. Thus He saith: "Our Cause is but one." Inasmuch as the Cause is one and the same, the Exponents thereof also must needs be one and the same. (KI152-3, para.161)*

## 12

*Sar-há bi-kamand-at bastih, dil-há az<sup>27</sup> gham-at khastih,  
Ham 'ámíy-i-shaydá'í, ham 'álim-i-Rabbání.*

*Bound are the heads by Thy locks, pierced the hearts  
by Thine anguish, be they of insane laymen or of Divine  
sages.*

The first hemistich presents the image of the hair of the Beloved—*kamand*, “A halter, noose, snare, lasso; slip-knot; a scaling-ladder . . . a lock of hair” (Steingass 1051)—that tie the lovers. Bausani writes that “the most common mystical explanation” of the hair of the Beloved is that it “symbolizes the ‘plurality of the phenomenal world that veils the face of God’s unity’” (*Religion in Iran* 280-1). It also presents the image of the anguish of the lovers—*gham*, “Being cloudy (day); being

intensely hot and suffocating; making sad; muzzling; covering; grief, sadness, anxiety, trouble, care; a source of regret; remorse; mourning, lamentation; loss” (Steingass 894). The second hemistich describes the universal effects of the love for the Beloved on all lovers, “*Be they of insane laymen* (‘ámíy-i-*shaydá’i*) *or of Divine sages* (‘álim-i-Rabbání).” ‘Ámí means “Blind, ignorant” (Steingass 868); *shaydá’*, “mad, insane, in love” (Steingass 772); ‘álim, “Learned, intelligent, wise” (Steingass 831); and *rabbání*, “Divine, godly” (Steingass 567). The two categories of seekers mentioned in this verse could be the same as the “*men of mind* (muṭáli‘ín) *and heart* (muṣhtáqín)” of the Four Valleys (FV63; Chihár Vádi 154). It is the ancient division between those who preferred the path of sobriety of asceticism and those who preferred the inebriation of the way of love.

## 13

*Man khúd zi Tú-am makhmúr, ham az Tú shudam mashhúr,*  
*Kih<sup>28</sup> dahí-am şad ján, ham<sup>29</sup> kih kuni-am qurbání.*

*I'm drunk of Thee, 'cause of Thee I'm notorious, whether*  
*Thou offerest me a hundred lives, or Thou slayest me.*

The lover proclaims his love for the Beloved. This love made him commit such foolish acts that now everyone talks about him and he has become *mashhúr*, that is, “public, notorious, well-known; published, divulged, conspicuous; celebrated, illustrious, noted, famous” (Steingass 1250). This is another trope of Sufi poetry, belonging to the *malámatí* strand. Marcello Perego, an Italian expert on Sufism, defines the *malámatí* Sufis as “persons who observe a perfect religious conduct, but carefully hide any ecstatic state (*Aḥwál*) and grace (*Wáridát*) which the One Being bestows upon them; they dissemble their good deeds, so that none but God may know them” (151). A number of Sufis of the *malámatíyya* tried to appear blameworthy in the eyes of common people. The second



hemistich restates the concept of the faithfulness of the lover, independently of the attitude of the Beloved.

## 14

*Gar Qábíd-i-arváhí, az chih kuní-am zindih?*

*Var Muḥiy-i-abdání, az chih kuní thu 'bání.*

*If Thou art the Angel of death, how come that Thou revivest me?*

*And if Thou art the Reviver of bodies, how is it that Thou actest as a snake?*

This distich presents another oxymoron. So cruel is the Beloved that the lover compares Him to the Angel of death, *Qábíd-i-arváhí*, literally the sequestrator of spirits. And yet from Him life comes. And if He gives life, why does He act as cruelly as a *thu*'bání, that is, "A large male serpent, a dragon, cockatrice, basilisk" (Steingass 345)? It seems the human reaction of a person when faced by the "*onrushing winds of . . . [God's] decree (qaḏá)*" (PM12, sec.9, para.2. Munáját 13). Bahá'u'lláh wrote in His *Súriy-i-Haykal*:

*Should We choose, at one time, to shed the radiance of Our loving providence upon the mirrors of all things, and, at another, to withhold from them the splendours of Our light, this verily lieth within Our power, and none hath the right to ask "why" or "wherefore." For We are potent indeed to achieve Our purpose, and render no account for that which We bring to pass. (35, para.68)*

And yet many "whys" and "wherefores" are voiced in the Tablet which Western Bahá'is know as the "Fire Tablet," which expresses concepts similar to those conveyed by this distich:

*Indeed the hearts of the sincere are consumed in the fire of separation: Where is the gleaming of the light of Thy Countenance, O Beloved of the worlds?*

*Those who are near unto Thee have been abandoned in the darkness of desolation: Where is the shining of the morn of Thy reunion, O Desire of the worlds?*

*The bodies of Thy chosen ones lie quivering on distant sands: Where is the ocean of Thy presence, O Enchanter of the worlds?*

*Longing hands are uplifted to the heaven of Thy grace and generosity: Where are the rains of Thy bestowal, O Answerer of the worlds?*

*The infidels have arisen in tyranny on every hand: Where is the compelling power of Thine ordaining pen, O Conqueror of the worlds?*

*The barking of dogs is loud on every side: Where is the lion of the forest of Thy might, O Chastiser of the worlds? (212-4)*

These words are reminiscent, to Christian ears, of the words uttered by Jesus on the cross a few moments before dying after many hours of agony:

*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? (Matthew 27:46, KJV)*

## 15

*Dar khar-gáh-i-sulṭán yik bár agar bi-kharámí,  
Sulṭán kuní-ash bandih, ham bandih kuní sulṭání.*

*If Thou graciously movest in the court of a king, Thou changest*

*The king into a servant and the servant into a king.*

The gracious pace of the Beloved is a Sufi motif of Persian mystical poetry. Ḥáfiz writes in this vein:

If, like the (lofty) cypress (*sarv*), a moment thou move in a  
rose-garden (*gulzár*)

In envy of thy face (*rúy*), every rose (*gul*) suffereth a  
thorn. (*Díván* 901, “*Ghazalyát*,” no.552, v.1; *Divan* 456,  
“*Ghazalyát*,” no.443, v.1)

This distich by Bahá’u’lláh exalts the power of the Beloved, Who can change a king into His humble vassal and bestow royal greatness upon a servant. As to the capacity to subdue a sovereign, Bahá’u’lláh writes about Muhammad in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*: “*Behold, how many are the Sovereigns who bow the knee before His name!*” (KI110, para.117). And the Báb reportedly said to His disciples:

*Heed not your weaknesses and frailty; fix your gaze upon the invincible power of the Lord, your God, the Almighty. Has He not, in past days, caused Abraham, in spite of His seeming helplessness, to triumph over the forces of Nimrod? Has He not enabled Moses, whose staff was His only companion, to vanquish Pharaoh and his hosts? Has He not established the ascendancy of Jesus, poor and lowly as He was in the eyes of men, over the combined forces of the Jewish people? Has He not subjected the barbarous and militant tribes of Arabia to the holy and transforming discipline of Muhammad, His Prophet?* (qtd. in Nabil 94)

As to the capacity to change a servant into a king, the Báb reportedly said to His disciples:

*You are the lowly, of whom God has thus spoken in His Book: “And We desire to show favour to those who were brought low in the land, and to make them*

*spiritual leaders among men, and to make them Our heirs.” You have been called to this station; you will attain to it, only if you arise to trample beneath your feet every earthly desire, and endeavour to become those “honoured servants of His who speak not till He hath spoken, and who do His bidding.” (qtd. ibid. 93)*

And ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote about Jesus:

*Peter was a fisherman and Mary Magdalene a peasant, but as they were specially favoured with the blessings of Christ, the horizon of their faith became illumined, and down to the present day they are shining from the horizon of everlasting glory. (SWAB105, sec.68)*

## 16

*Yik shu‘lih<sup>30</sup> zi<sup>31</sup> rúy-at dar gul-bun-i-Ján ámad,  
Afrúkht jamál-i-ján chún láliy-i-nu‘mání.*

*A spark of Thy face fell upon the rose-bush of the soul,  
And lit its beauty as a crimson tulip.*

This distich uses many images typical of Persian mystical literature: the “*spark (shu‘lih)*” of the face (*rúy*), “*the rose-bush of the soul (gul-bun-i-Ján)*,” the “*crimson tulip (láliy-i-nu‘mání)*.” The image of the face has been explained above (see above verse 7). This verse seems to use the image of the Face of the Beloved to hint at the Beauty of the Beloved, at His influence on the lover and at the unveiling of His Beauty. As to the rose (*gul*), in the Sufi world it “is the supreme manifestation of Divine beauty or the symbol of the beloved cheek” (Schimmel, *Deciphering* 26). As to the tulip (*lálíh*), “poets have tended to compare the red tulip that looks indeed like a flame to the fire on the sacred mountain [Sinai]” (ibid. 10). Ḥáfiẓ uses the image of the tulip in the following verse:

In the garden (*bágh*) (of the existence), renew the usage's of the faith (*dín*) of Zardusht.

Now that the (red) tulip (*lálíh*) hath kindled the fire (*átash*) of Nimrod. (*Díván* 253, "Ghazalyát," no.121, v.8; *Divan* 229, "Ghazalyát," no.219, v.8)

Ḥáfiz associates the tulip to the fire of Nimrod, because God has transformed the fire of the furnace, into which Abraham had been thrown, into a garden. Likewise, Bahá'u'lláh associates the tulip to the fire lit by the Beloved in the spiritual worlds, a fire that is as sweet as a garden for the lovers. The tulip described by Bahá'u'lláh is crimson (*nu'mání*). In the Muslim world

red is connected with life, health, and blood; it is the colour of the bridal veil that seems to guarantee fertility; and it is used as an apotropaic colour. Red wine, as well as fire (in its positive aspects) and the red rose, all point to the Divine Glory, as it is said that the *ridá al-kibriyá*, "the cloak of Divine Glory," is radiant red. (*Deciphering* 16)

This distich seems to describe how the Beauty of the Beloved (the spark of His face) changes the hearts of His lovers ("*the rose-bush of the soul*"), where He raises the vermilion tulip of knowledge and good deeds. 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke diffusely of the transforming power of the Manifestations of God. For example He said:

*The holy Manifestations of God come into the world to dispel the darkness of the animal, or physical, nature of man, to purify him from his imperfections in order that his heavenly and spiritual nature may become quickened, his divine qualities awakened, his perfections visible, his potential powers revealed and all the virtues of the world of humanity latent within him may come to life. These holy Manifestations of God are the Educators and*

*Trainers of the world of existence, the Teachers of the world of humanity. They liberate man from the darkness of the world of nature, deliver him from despair, error, ignorance, imperfections and all evil qualities. They clothe him in the garment of perfections and exalted virtues. Men are ignorant; the Manifestations of God make them wise. They are animalistic; the Manifestations make them human. They are savage and cruel; the Manifestations lead them into kingdoms of light and love. They are unjust; the Manifestations cause them to become just. Man is selfish; They sever him from self and desire. Man is haughty; They make him meek, humble and friendly. He is earthly; They make him heavenly. Men are material; the Manifestations transform them into divine semblance. They are immature children; the Manifestations develop them into maturity. Man is poor; They endow him with wealth. Man is base, treacherous and mean; the Manifestations of God uplift him into dignity, nobility and loftiness. (PUP 465-6)*

## 17

*Vah vah, chih nasím ámad, bá muzhdiy-i-ján ámad,<sup>32</sup>*

*Kaz Mashriq-i-Ján ámad án Ṭal'at-i-Yazdání.*

*O! What a breeze wafted announcing to the soul the glad tiding*

*That from the East of the Spirit that Divine Face hath appeared.*

This distich poetically announces the new Revelation. This announcement is brought by the breeze, a reminiscence of the morning breeze that, according to the tradition, brought to Muhammad the scent of the holiness of Uways al-Qaraní who lived in Yemen. This breeze comes from the East, the place whence the sun rises. Rúmí writes:

Finally from the Orient of the spirit (*mashriq-i-ján*), like the sun, arose

He Whom the soul (*ján*) was searching in private and in public (*Díván*, “*Ghazalyát*,” no.142, v.2)

These verses are reminiscent of the following words written by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

*From the beginning of time until the present day the light of Divine Revelation hath risen in the East and shed its radiance upon the West. The illumination thus shed hath, however, acquired in the West an extraordinary brilliancy. Consider the Faith proclaimed by Jesus. Though it first appeared in the East, yet not until its light had been shed upon the West did the full measure of its potentialities become manifest . . . In the books of the Prophets certain glad-tidings are recorded which are absolutely true and free from doubt. The East hath ever been the dawning-place of the Sun of Truth. In the East all the Prophets of God have appeared . . . The West hath acquired illumination from the East but in some respects the reflection of the light hath been greater in the Occident. This is specially true of Christianity. Jesus Christ appeared in Palestine and His teachings were founded in that country. Although the doors of the Kingdom were first opened in that land and the bestowals of God were spread broadcast from its center, the people of the West have embraced and promulgated Christianity more fully than the people of the East. (qtd. in WOB 74-5)<sup>33</sup>*

The good news is that the Face of God has appeared.

## 18

*Ján-há bi-paríd az shawq, dil-há bi-ramíd az dhawq,  
Ham ‘Ishq shud-ash ‘áshiq ham jawhar-i-imkání.*

*Souls soared with yearning, hearts were enraptured in  
ecstasy,*

*Love fell in love with Him, and so did the essence of  
creation.*

This distich describes the impact of the advent of the new Revelation. The whole creation falls in love with the Beloved, even Love. Outwardly, when the Manifestation of God appears in the world, nothing happens. On the contrary, an inward process starts that slowly but steadily moves towards the birth of a new civilization. Bahá'u'lláh has often described His Own advent in triumphant words. He wrote for example in His *Lawḥ-i-Riḍván*:

*This is the Day whereon the unseen world crieth out: "Great is thy blessedness, O earth, for thou hast been made the foot-stool of thy God, and been chosen as the seat of His mighty throne." The realm of glory exclaimeth: "Would that my life could be sacrificed for thee, for He Who is the Beloved of the All-Merciful hath established His sovereignty upon thee, through the power of His Name that hath been promised unto all things, whether of the past or of the future." This is the Day whereon every sweet smelling thing hath derived its fragrance from the smell of My garment—a garment that hath shed its perfume upon the whole of creation. This is the Day whereon the rushing waters of everlasting life have gushed out of the Will of the All-Merciful. Haste ye, with your hearts and souls, and quaff your fill, O Concourse of the realms above! (29, para.6)*

Another example are the words whereby He foresees His arrival to the prison of 'Akká:

*Upon Our arrival, We were welcomed with banners of  
light, whereupon the Voice of the Spirit cried out*



*saying: "Soon will all that dwell on earth be enlisted under these banners."* (qtd. in GPB 184, sec.11, para.4)

In the dimensions of the human world His arrival in 'Akká is described by Shoghi Effendi as follows:

Having, after a miserable voyage, disembarked at 'Akká, all the exiles, men, women and children, were, under the eyes of a curious and callous population that had assembled at the port to behold the "God of the Persians," conducted to the army barracks, where they were locked in, and sentinels detailed to guard them. "*The first night,*" Bahá'u'lláh testifies in the Lawḥ-i-Ra'ís,<sup>34</sup> "*all were deprived of either food or drink . . . They even begged for water, and were refused.*" So filthy and brackish was the water in the pool of the courtyard that no one could drink it. Three loaves of black and salty bread were assigned to each, which they were later permitted to exchange, when escorted by guards to the market, for two of better quality. (GPB 186-7, sec.11, para.10)

Evidently in the spiritual words, which are not subject to the rules of time and space, things appear in a different perspective than in the earthly world.

## 19

*Az ḥikmat-i-ú ulfat-i-má-bayin-i-dú ḍidd zâhir,*

*Ham 'Ishq shudih bandih, ham 'Aql kunad darbání.*

*Through His wisdom, the coincidence of opposites is made manifest,*

*Now love becometh a slave, now the Intellect a porter.*

In the Manifestation of God the opposites coincide. Bahá'u'lláh wrote in later Writings: "*I bear witness that in His*

*person solidity and fluidity have been joined and combined*" (PM48, sec.38, para.3). Bahá'u'lláh explained moreover:

*These Prophets and chosen Ones of God are the recipients and revealers of all the unchangeable attributes and names of God. They are the mirrors that truly and faithfully reflect the light of God. Whatsoever is applicable to them is in reality applicable to God, Himself, Who is both the Visible and the Invisible (zâhir-i-mastúr) . . . Through the manifold attributes of these Essences of Detachment, Who are both the first and the last, the seen and the hidden, it is made evident that He Who is the Sun of Truth is "the First and the Last, the Seen, and the Hidden [Koran 57:3]." (KI142-3; KMI110)*

An aspect of this coincidence is the harmonious balance between elements that human beings often see as conflicting with one another, as for example mercy and justice, love and reason, religion and science. This distich explains that, on the one hand, love becomes a slave, possibly of the "*divine, universal mind, whose sovereignty enlighteneth all created things*" (Four Valleys 52), and, on the other, the Intellect becomes a porter, that is, it submits to Revelation. Rûmî writes in this vein:

O perfect full moon (*máh*), the house of the heart belongs to  
Thee,

Intellect that was a lord is wholly submitted to Thee.

(*Díván*, "Ghazalyát," no.2243, v.2)

## 20

*Darvish*, ma-dar zín *bish* ín *pardiy-i-asrár*,

Kaz *shahr faghán khízad* vaz '*álam-i-hayvání*.

*Stop tearing asunder the veil of mystery, O Dervish:*

*A cry riseth from the city of men and the world of brutes.*

This poem, as a few others, ends with a call to silence. The clamour that rises “*from the city of men and the world of brutes*” could be due to the fact that the city of men is not prepared to receive the Beloved. This verse is reminiscent of the following words by Bahá’u’lláh in His Riḍvānu’l-‘Adl:

*The fears and agitation which the revelation of this law provokes in men’s hearts should indeed be likened to the cries of the suckling babe weaned from his mother’s milk, if ye be of them that perceive.* (175, para.1)

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- . Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat (Tablet of Wisdom), in *Tablets* 137-52.
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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The poems are listed according to their growing length.
- <sup>2</sup> See also excerpts in Mázandarání 142-43.
- <sup>3</sup> See also *Majmú‘iy-i-Áthár* 36:455; and excerpts in Mázandarání 141-42.
- <sup>4</sup> See Julio Savi, “The Inebriation of His Enrapturing Call,” in *Lights of ‘Irfán* 15 (2014):311-54.
- <sup>5</sup> See GPB120, sec.7, para.35.
- <sup>6</sup> “Ghazal. ii. In Persian literature,” from now on in this section Bausani.
- <sup>7</sup> *Majmú‘ih* 30 omits this invocation.

- <sup>8</sup> “Ahriman, the principle of Evil, opposed to Ormuzd, the principle of Good; the devil; a seducer; a demon” (Steingass 124).
- <sup>9</sup> *Surúsh* means “An angel; Gabriel” (Steingass 680).
- <sup>10</sup> Referred to “a certain *Shaykh* ‘Abdu’l-Ḥusayn, a crafty and obstinate priest, whose consuming jealousy of Bahá’u’lláh was surpassed only by his capacity to stir up mischief both among those of high degree and also amongst the lowest of the low, Arab or Persian, who thronged the streets and markets of Kazimayn, Karbilá and Baghdad” (GPB141, sec.8, para.30).
- <sup>11</sup> *Majmú‘ih* 30 writes *jilvihí*.
- <sup>12</sup> *Majmú‘ih* 30 writes *az*.
- <sup>13</sup> *Majmú‘ih* 30 omits *shud*.
- <sup>14</sup> See Aristotle, *De Anima* [On the soul], 3:4, 430-31.
- <sup>15</sup> *Majmú‘ih* 30 writes *‘ishq-u*.
- <sup>16</sup> *Mítháq* means “A promise, agreement, bargain, compact, confederacy, alliance, league” (Steingass 1359).
- <sup>17</sup> *Shaytán* means “Satan” (Steingass 776).
- <sup>18</sup> *Majmú‘ih* 30 writes *hayrat*.
- <sup>19</sup> Personal provisional translation by the author with Ms. Faezeh Mardani, added terms in brackets.
- <sup>20</sup> *Majmú‘ih* 30 writes *gúyam*.
- <sup>21</sup> *Majmú‘ih* 30 writes *ayat*.
- <sup>22</sup> *Majmú‘ih* 30 omits *az-Tú*.
- <sup>23</sup> The word “lover” translates both *al-ḥabíb* and *al-áshiq*.
- <sup>24</sup> *Majmú‘ih* 30 writes *Miṣr-i-bahar*, that is the city of springtime.
- <sup>25</sup> In Persian *Miṣr-i-Iláhí*, “Divine Egypt.”
- <sup>26</sup> In Persian *qamíṣ*, literally, shirt.
- <sup>27</sup> *Majmú‘ih* 30 writes *zi*.
- <sup>28</sup> *Majmú‘ih* 30 writes *gah*.
- <sup>29</sup> *Majmú‘ih* 30 writes *gah*.
- <sup>30</sup> *Majmú‘ih* 30 writes *shu‘lihí*.
- <sup>31</sup> *Majmú‘ih* 30 writes *az*.
- <sup>32</sup> *Majmú‘ih* 30 writes *ján-bakhsh*, that is soul-refreshing.
- <sup>33</sup> See moreover GPB253-54; CF30; PT23, sec.8, para.3; PUP289.
- <sup>34</sup> A Tablet by Bahá’u’lláh, revealed in the early ‘Akká period and addressed to ‘Alí Páshá, the Grand Vizir of Turkey. See SLH159-73.



# “At Dawn the Friend came to my bed”

An early fruit of the Supreme Pen<sup>1</sup>

Julio Savi

At dawn the Friend came to my bed (*Saḥar ámad*)<sup>2</sup>

He is the Provider in all circumstances

At dawn the Friend came to my bed: [1]

“O fool for love, O broken heart,

O thou, who pinest for Me wherever thou art,

And wherever thou art, liest in prison for Me,

Now an asp twisted at thy foot,

Now a rutilant chain at thy neck.

O thou, who didn't spend a night on a bed of ease, O thou,

Who didn't find a moment of relief from the woes of the world.

The heart of the world was burnt by the fire of thy wails, [5]

The eye of the universe was consumed by the fire of thine afflictions.

Now is placed in fetters thy neck, as if thou werest a rebellious

Servant, now, bound in chains, thou art hurried to the bazaar.

Now thou art wronged in the hands of the oppressor,

Now thou spendest days and nights in the prison of cruelty.

Thy pains set on fire the hearts of the friends,

Thy groans darkened the faces of the lovers.

Thine eyes shed rubies of blood, whereby

The eye of the twilight hath turned pomegranate red.

After so many toils thou met in My path, [10]

Thou doest not cool down, nor bitterly regret.

Wherefore art thou restless tonight? Wherefore

Hath thy body become as thin as a thread?

In the night thou tосsest and turnest on thy couch,

Thou tосsest and groanest, as bitten by a snake.

Why doest thou turn and groan, now?

Why doeth thy face turn pale?"

I answered: "O Friend! O Healer of my soul!

How is it that Thou camest to this sick bed?

O Thou, by Whose Face the sun is enlightened in the sky, [15]

O Thou, by Whose love the essence of peace is unsettled.

The sky hath filled its skirt with pearls,

That it may lay it down at the feet of Thy Majesty.

Doest Thou wonder about Thy lover's plight?

Thou wilt discover its secrets in the pallor of his face.

My groans proclaim the secret of my heart;

My tearful eyes reveal the riddle of my soul.

In my love for Thee I received many an arrow

Of cruelty, I fell into infidel hands.

I was dragged through mountains and plains, [20]

I was drawn in front of the wicked.

Should I tell what I saw in my love for Thee,

My tongue would grow weary of speaking.  
 I don't complain, O Friend, for Thy pitiless sword  
     And I cherish my pains for Thee as my own heart.  
 I embrace Thy decree with heart and soul,  
     My spirit yearns after Thy tribulations.  
 My soul won't cut the lace of Thy love,  
     Should it be beheaded with a deadly blade.  
 I tied my heart to the curl of Thy tresses, [25]  
     That it may not be unloosed till the Judgement Day.  
 Should I be slaughtered a myriad times, with every  
     Moment, still I wouldn't rebel against Thy love.  
 In the night season I burn in the fire of anguish,  
     'Cause my head hasn't been, O Friend, hung on the gallows.  
 I come with no veil before Thee to behold, O Almighty,  
     Thy Face beyond any mortal frame, O Unique One.  
 The Birds of Eternity returned to their nest,  
     We remained downtrodden and wretched on earth.  
 The time hath come for the banner to be hoisted. [30]  
     O Mystery of God! Draw forth Thy hand from the Unseen,  
 That Thou mayest discharge the mortals from their clay,  
     And cleanse the mirrors of their hearts from their rust.  
 From the shackles of the world, O Thou,  
     Release all these pilgrims and companions  
 Attire their heads with the crown of acceptance,  
     Gird up their temples with the girdle of love."  
 That's enough, O Dervish! Don't torment us any longer,  
     'Cause many sparks have fallen from these words.

## “At Dawn the Friend came to my bed”

Bahá'u'lláh's poem which begins with the verse *Saḥar ámad bi bistar-am Yár*, “At dawn the Friend came to my bed,” is one among eight Persian poems signed “Dervish,” and published by the Iranian Bahá'í scholar ‘Abdu'l-Ḥamíd Ishráq Khávarí (1902–1972) in his multi-volume anthology of the Writings of the Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith *Má'idiy-i-Asmání* (4:176-211).<sup>3</sup>

### Literary aspects

As to the perspective of the form, this specific poem may be defined a poem in the light of the following definition of poetry, given by Franklin D. Lewis, an expert in Persian Language and Literature, as to Nineteenth century Persia: “rhymed speech (*moqafâ*) composed in lines (*bayt / abyât*) following one of the established quantitative meters (*bahr / bohur*) and arranged according to a particular form” (“Poetry as Revelation” 102). Specifically, *Saḥar ámad bi bistar-am Yár* conforms to the traditional Persian verse form of the *qaṣídih*.

The *qaṣídih* is a poem “always designed to be chanted or sung” (Lane 7:60), born among the Arabs, of whose lyrics it was “the primary instrument” (Bausani, “Letteratura neopersiana” 176), and later introduced into Persia. Its name derives from the Arabic root *qaṣada*, that is, “he made him, or it, his object; he aimed at him, or it: he sought, endeavored after, pursued, or endeavored to reach or attain, or obtain, him, or it: he desired it, or wished for it: he intended it; purposed it; or meant it” (Lane 7:59). As Fritz Johann Heinrich Krenkow (1872–1953), a German scholar in Arabic, Persian and Islamic Studies, and Gérard Lecomte (1926–1997), a French scholar in Arabic and Islamic studies, explain in the Encyclopaedia of Islam, the primitive *qaṣídih* “was intended to eulogize the tribe of the poet and denigrate the opposing tribes. Later it was concerned with the eulogy of a personality or a family from whom the poet was soliciting help or subsidies.” Probably on the ground

of this etymology, Edward G. Browne (1862-1926), the renowned British Orientalist, called the *qaṣīdih* “purpose-poem” (Literary History 2:22). In Persia it came to be mainly used as “an instrument of panegyric or philosophic and moralizing poetry” (“Letteratura neopersiana” 176). The most important formal aspects of Persian *qaṣīdih*, as listed in the Encyclopaedia of Islam (de Fouchécour), the Encyclopaedia Britannica (“Qasida”), and other sources, are as follows:

Length: “the number of its distiches exceeds 15 and does not exceed 30” (de Fouchécour). However, according to other sources, *qaṣīdih* may have from “60 to 100 lines” (“Qasida”). Henri Wilberforce-Clarke (1840-1905), first translator of the *Bústán* of Sa‘dí and of the *Sikandar Námih* by Nízamí, remarks: “This kind of poem is read in the presence of him in whose honour it is composed; and therefore should not be so long as to weary him” (xv).

Rhyme: the ending of the first hemistich of the first distich of the *qaṣīdih* “had to supply the one single rhyme for the whole poem. The rhyme was repeated in each *ḍarb*, the final part of the second hemistich of each distich, according to complex rules” (de Fouchécour).

Metre: “virtually any metre is acceptable for the *qasida* except the *rajaz*,<sup>4</sup> which has lines only half the length of those in other metres” (“Qasida”). Lewis reminds us that according to “traditional metrics ... a poem should follow the same meter throughout” (“Short Poem” 85).

Contents: “as a general rule, the poet must ensure that the meaning of each *bayt* is independent of its neighbours” (“Qasida”).

Three parts: all authors agree in saying that classical *qaṣīdih*s are divided into three parts, however they differ from one another in explaining the features of the three parts. We will follow the model offered by the French Iranianist Charles-Henri de Fouchécour. The first part, “the exordium, must

command attention by touching the hearts of the listeners, an effect which is often achieved by a *ghazal*, a courtly song,<sup>5</sup> either by describing the beauty of the beloved and the state of the lover (*nasíb*), or through the amorous poet making his listeners share in his condition (*tashbíb*)” (de Fouchécour). The Italian Islamicist Alessandro Bausani (1921-1988) comments that in the first part “the poet laments his separation from his beloved one or describes her abandoned home or springtime.” He also writes that at the end of this part the poet uses “some skilful devices of one or two verses,” called *gurízgáh*, to pass “into the second and most important part” (“Letteratura neopersiana” 176). The second part (*madh*), an

eulogy for a prince or protector, is the central portion of the *kaşída*; put into a sensitive frame of mind by the exordium ... the listener will be carried away by the poet’s skill; all that is required is a degree of rhythm in the eulogy, a strong effect of *balágha* (a wealth of meaning in a few words) but an uncontentious one, and the transport of the soul out of its ordinary element. (de Fouchécour)

The third part is “the petition: the poet must know how to ‘wrap up’ his request ... stirring the person being praised to reward him by the charm of his poem and the renown it engenders” (de Fouchécour).

Important verses: three distiches require particular care: the first one, because “it opens the poem and signals all the areas of expression”; the transitional verse between the first and the second part, the eulogy, “which must skilfully introduce the name of the person being eulogised”; and the final verse (*maqta’*), “which must be of a quality that redeems any mediocrities in the work” (de Fouchécour).

The pen name of the poet (*takhalluş*) is included in the final verse (*maqta’*).

In this poem Bahá'u'lláh adopts a loose form of *qaṣīdih*, introducing formal and thematic innovations and making several exceptions to the classic model of this poetical form. As to its length, this poem has 34 distiches (15-30 is the average length of a classical *qaṣīdih*). As to its rhyme, it is classically one-rhymed (in *-ár*). As to its metre, it seems that Bahá'u'lláh does not use the same verse throughout His poem, although the prosodic rules of *qaṣīdih* require the poet to follow the same metre throughout. As to an independent meaning in each verse, this rule has an exception in verses 30-1, which together convey a single meaning.

*The time hath come for the banner to be hoisted.*

*O Mystery of God! Draw forth Thy hand from the  
Unseen,*

*That Thou mayest discharge the mortals from their clay,*

*And cleanse the mirrors of the hearts from their rust.*

Besides, the whole poem is a kind of dialogue between the Beloved and the Poet as a lover, and thus no verse is wholly independent from the other ones. All verses are connected to one another by the special form adopted by Bahá'u'lláh, as if He intended to endow this poem with a unitary structure. He describes a dialogue between the lover and the Beloved, Who at dawn goes to the lover's bedside. It is a loose form of the rhetoric device, typical of the *qaṣīdih* and *ghazal*, called *su'ál-u-javáb* (question and answer). There are several poems totally written on this base. Bahá'u'lláh also uses *su'ál-u javáb* in two other poems, *Ishq az Sidriy-i-A'lá ámad* and *But-i-má ámad bá baṭṭí-u bádiḥ*. In this respect these three poems have illustrious precursors, for example numbers 50 and 166 of the poems by Jalalu'd-Dín Rúmí (1207-1273) translated by Arthur John Arberry (1905-1969), the well-known British orientalist (*Mystical poems* 1:44-45 and 138), and numbers 136 and 194 of the poems by Shamsu'd-Dín Ḥafiz (ca.1318-1390) translated by Wilberforce-Clark (see *Díván* 280 and 366-7). Rúmí writes:

He said, "Who is at the door?" I said, "Your humble slave." He said, "What is your business?" I said, "Lord, to greet you."

And he goes on in this vein for 12 verses. Ḥafīz writes:

To the (true Beloved), I said: "Grief for Thee, I have."  
He said: "To the end (when union is attained), thy grief cometh:

And he continues in this fashion for 8 verses.

As to the three parts in which each *qaṣīdih* is usually divided, the three parts of this poem are not so well distinguished from one another as in a classical *qaṣīdih*, and rather follow one another without a precise neat line. The first part comprises verses 1-14. The second hemistich of verse 1, which mentions the state of the lover, "*fool for love*" and "*broken heart*," loosely resembles a *nasīb*, a verse describing the beauty of the Beloved and the state of the lover. We cannot say whether the Poet really wants "his listeners share in his condition," as it usually happens in a *tashbīb*. Verse 14 may be loosely considered as a *gorízgáh*, or passage, using "some skilful devices of one or two verses," to pass "into the second and most important part." The Poet asks the Beloved: "*How is it that Thou camest to this sick bed?*" This question introduces the second part, which comprises verses 15-29, and should be a *madḥ*, that is an eulogy of the Beloved. However, only two verses, 15 and 16, are devoted to a direct description of the Beloved, "*by Whose face the sun is enlightened in the sky*" and "*by Whose love the essence of peace is unsettled.*" The other verses continue describing the Poet. This second description of the Poet is different from that of the first part, because it dwells on the relation between the Poet and the Beloved, and especially the Poet's faithfulness to His own love for the Beloved. Obviously, when the Poet describes His own faithfulness to the Beloved, somehow He implicitly hints to the Beloved's greatness, beauty and power. Could such a description



be considered as an eulogy of the Beloved? Verse 29 also seems to meet the prerequisites of a *gorízgáh*, a passage. It says:

*The Birds of Eternity returned to their nest,  
We remained downtrodden and wretched on earth.*

It describes the feelings of lover: he is “*downtrodden and wretched*,” and lonely, because all His companions have offered their lives in their love for their Beloved. This description prepares the petition voiced in the third part, verses 30-4. The Poet’s petition is absolutely unselfish. The Most Great Spirit is implored, His advent is invoked, for the good of all “*mortals*,” “*pilgrims and companions*” on the spiritual path.

As to the three important verses of this ode, the first (*maṭla’*) connotes the whole poem: “*At dawn the Friend came to my bed.*” As to the transitional verse between the first and the second part, verse 14,

*I answered: “O Friend! O Healer of my soul!  
How is it that Thou camest to this sick bed?”*

may be loosely considered as a transitional verse (*gurízgáh*). The Beloved is called: “*Friend*” and “*Healer of my soul*,” an especially intimate description of the Most Great Spirit, to Whom Bahá’u’lláh seems to address this poem. As to the last verse, *maqta’*, “which must be of a quality that redeems any mediocrities in the work,” it will be commented upon later on. As to the *nom de plume* (*takhalluṣ*), as has been said, Bahá’u’lláh adopts the name of “*Dervish*,” and this appears in the final verse.

## Rhetorical devices

Bahá’u’lláh uses in this ode a number of rhetorical devices typical of Persian poetry. The most important of them are as follows.

*Tajnis*, literally “alliteration” (Steingass 283), or *jinás*, literally “play on words, pun” (Aryanpur Kashani 376), are “actual graphic or phonetic play on words ... of various kinds which the reader can easily imagine” (“Letteratura neopersiana” 177). Strictly connected as it is to the phonetic feature of the language in which the poem has been written, the alliteration cannot be usually preserved in translations. For example Bahá’u’lláh writes:

“with no veil (*bí-ḥijáb*) ... beyond any mortal frame (*bí-jassab*)” (v.28) – the alliteration “*bí-ḥijáb ... bí-jassab*” is obviously lost in the English translation;

“That You may discharge the mortals from their clay (*Tá rahání khákyán-rá Tú zi khák*)” (v.31) – also in this verse the alliteration “*khákyán ... khák*” is lost;

“From the shackles of the world ... release (*zi qayd-i-ín jahán bi-rahán*)” (v.32) – the alliteration “*ín jahán* (the world) *bi-rahán* (release)” is lost.

“Attire their heads with the crown of acceptance (*Bar sar-ishán nih az táj-i-qabúl tájí*)” (v.33) – the alliteration “*táj ... tájí*” is lost.

*Isti‘arîh* is “a metaphor, like ‘the eye of the intellect will not use any collyrium to purify its sight but the dust of thy battles’” (“Letteratura neopersiana” 177). *Saḥar ámad bi bistar-am Yár* is rich in such metaphors, as are all Bahá’u’lláh’s poems. These are the most important examples:

“bed of ease (*bistar-i-ráḥat*)” (v.4);

“the heart of the world (*kabid-i-‘álam*) ... the eye of the universe (*chashm-i-jahán*)” (v.5);

“the prison of cruelty (*sijn-i-jafá*)” (v.7);

“an arrow / Of cruelty (*tír-i-jafá*)” (v.19);

“*Thy pitiless sword (tígh-i-jafá-t, lit. the sword of Your cruelty)*” (v.22);

“*the lace of Thy love (rishtiy-i-ḥubb-i-Tú)*” (v.24);

“*the fire of anguish (átash-i-gham)*” (v.27);

“*Draw forth Thy hand from the Unseen (dastí az Ghayb bar ár)*” (v.30);

“*the mirrors of their hearts (áyiniy-i-dil)*” (v.31);

“*the crown of acceptance (táj-i-qabúl) ... the girdle of love (az ḥubb zunnár)*” (v.33).

*Tashbīh*, “similitude, likeness” (Steingass 302), is “our comparison, of various, easily to guess, kinds” (“Letteratura neopersiana” 177-8). For example Bahá’u’lláh writes:

“*thy body ... as thin as a thread (gashtih badan-at chún tár)*” (v.11);

“*as bitten by a snake (kih gazíd-ash már)*” (v.12).

*Hashv*, or redundancy, is the “juxtaposition of synonymous words to reinforce a poetical concept” (“Letteratura neopersiana” 177). For example, Bahá’u’lláh writes

“*thou tосsest and turnest (ghaltí-u píchí)*” (v.12);

“*the secret of my heart (Sirr-i-dil) ... the riddle of my soul (Ramz-i-ján)*” (v.18);

“*downtrodden and wretched (dhalíl-u khwár)*” (v.29).

*Tanásub*, “relation, conformity” (Steingass 326), is the introduction of “things naturally associated, as for example arch and arrow, night and day, etc.” (“Letteratura neopersiana” 178). Bahá’u’lláh associates

“*sun ... sky (shams ... samá’)*” (v.15);

“*mountains and plains (kúh ... dasht)*” (v.20);

“*Birds ... nest (aṭyár ... áshyán)*” (v.29).

In verse 32 He mentions “*pilgrims and companions (muhájarín-u anṣár)*.” The association of these two words goes back to Koran 9:101:

*As for those who led the way, the first of the Mohadjers, and the Ansars, and those who have followed their noble conduct, God is well pleased with them, and they with Him: He hath made ready for them gardens under whose trees the rivers flow: to abide therein for aye: this shall be the great bliss.*

and to Koran 9:18:

*Now hath God turned Him unto the Prophet and unto the refugees (Mohadjers), and unto the helpers (Ansars), who followed him in the hour of distress, after that the hearts of a part of them had well nigh failed them. Then turned He unto them, for He was Kind to them, Merciful.*

*Ḥusn-i-ta’líl* is a “fantastic aetiology, that is ascribing fantastic, poetical causes to real facts and things” (“Letteratura neopersiana” 178). Bahá’u’lláh writes in this vein:

*Thy pains set on fire the hearts of the friends;  
Thy groans darkened the faces of the lover.* (v.8)

*Thine eyes shed rubies of blood, whereby  
The eye of the twilight hath turned pomegranate red.* (v.9)

*Mubálighih*, “exaggeration” (Steingass 1149), is our hyperbole, which in Persian poetry “takes incredibly extreme forms” (“Letteratura neopersiana” 178). Bahá’u’lláh writes in this vein:

*Should I tell what I saw in my love for Thee,  
My tongue would grow weary of speaking.* (v.21)

*I tied my heart to the curl of Thy tresses,*

*That it may be not be unloosed till the Judgment Day. (v.25)*

*Should I be slaughtered a myriad times, with every*

*Moment, still I wouldn't rebel against Thy love. (v.26)*

*Raddu'l-'ajjuz 'ala'ş-şadr* “consists in using the same word in two different parts of the verse, that which confers a sense of rhythm to the whole” (“Letteratura neopersiana” 178). Like *tajnís*, also this rhetorical device is strictly connected to the phonetic features of the Persian language, and thus it cannot be usually preserved in translations. For example Bahá'u'lláh writes in this vein:

*The heart of the world was burnt by the fire of Thy wails*

(átash-i-áh),

*The eyes of the universe was consumed by the fire (átash-  
bár, lit. inflamed) of thine afflictions. (v.5)*

“Cause my head (sar-am) hasn't been ... hung on the gallows  
(sar-i-dár)” (v.27).

*Husn-i-maqṭa'*, or beautiful final verse, “consists in a skilful request for a prize written by the poet who puts his signature in the last verse of his *qaṣídè*” (“Letteratura neopersiana” 178). The poems written by Bahá'u'lláh have not a human addressee, to whom He might ask something. Therefore this device does not appear in this form in His poems. At most Bahá'u'lláh addresses His “beautiful final verse” to Himself, as for example verse 34, in which He urges Himself not to reveal Himself to the world, because the times are not yet ripe:

*That's enough, O Dervish! Don't torment us any longer,*

*'Cause many sparks have fallen from these words.*

*Taḍádd*, which Haïm translates “Contrast ... antilogy” (1:445), but would more precisely be translated “antithesis,” is “the rhetorical opposing or contrasting of ideas by means of

grammatically parallel arrangements of words, clauses, or sentences” (Webster’s 96). Bahá’u’lláh uses this rhetorical device in the first hemistich of verse 15:

*O Thou, by Whose love the essence of peace is unsettled.*

### The contents of the poem

The first person narrator is always Bahá’u’lláh, the lover. This poem seems to describe the mystical experience of His encounter with the Most Great Spirit, the Friend, in Teheran’s Síyáh-Chál. The lover is sleepless, pale and thin. So faithful is he to his Beloved that he will willingly suffer for Him to the Day of Judgment. The Beloved, so caring that He goes to the bedside of His lover (v.1), does not appear ironic and cruel, as it usually does in Persian mystical poetry. He is even tender-hearted, when He asks the lover the reasons of his sleeplessness and faithfulness (vv.11-13):

*Wherefore art thou restless tonight? Wherefore  
Hath thy body become as thin as a thread?*

*In the night thou tосsest and turnest on thy couch,  
Thou tосsest and groanest, as bitten by a snake.*

*Why doest thou turn and groan, now?  
Why doeth thy face turn pale?*

If we read this poem according to the classical standards of Persian mystical poetry, we could think that the Beloved is so cruel that He mocks His lover, because of his acceptance of the pains he is meeting in his love for Him. An example of this kind of scorn may be found in the following verse of a *ghazal* by Rúmí:

My idol scolds, saying, “Why have you fallen in the middle of the road?” (*Mystical Poems* 2:121, no.366, v.1)

But if we read verses 11-13 in a Bahá'í perspective, they seem to say that the Beloved worries for His lover and sympathizes with him. In this respect, they are reminiscent of the dialogue between Bahá'u'lláh and the Maid of Heaven as described in *Lawh-i-Húriyyih*. In this Tablet the Maid of Heaven perceives such a pain in Bahá'u'lláh that She lifts “*Her gaze to the heavens with grief and misery,*” and looks “*at the earth in confusion and regret*” (“Tablet of the Maiden,” provisional translation by Juan R. Cole).

The figure of the Beloved is just outlined in verses 15-6. He seems an exalted spiritual Entity, “*Almighty (Kirdigár)*” (v.28), “*Unique One (Aḥad)*” (v.28), a “*Mystery of God (Sirr-i-Khudá)*” (v.30). Later on, verse 31 describes Him as capable of relieving “*the mortals from their clay*” and of cleansing “*the mirrors of the hearts from their rust.*” The lover does not suffer for his remoteness from the Beloved, because the Beloved is beside him. He suffers because his love is exposed to the wickedness of his fellow-beings, who oppress him in several ways. The autobiographical reference is very clear. In His love for the Beloved, Bahá'u'lláh has renounced whatever may interest a common human being: home, wealth, social position, connections, even His country. It is not the Beloved the cause of His pain. His own faithfulness to love is the cause of his pains.

## Major themes

Of the four major themes of Persian lyrical poetry as described by Bausani, that is “*wine, love, springtime and mystics*” (“*Letteratura neopersiana*” 176), only wine is absent. Springtime motifs mostly appear as nature tropes. Mystical themes appear sometimes as theological and scriptural motifs. They also appear as didactic themes, the early seeds of the new mystical way that Bahá'u'lláh was opening to His lovers. Last but not least, this poem has many autobiographical references.

## Love

The whole poem is based on this uplifting theme. It may be viewed as a passionate conversation between two lovers. Many of the clichés of the lover language of Sufi poetry appear in these verses. The lover is “*fool for love*,” broken hearted, pining away for his Lover, sleepless, thin and pale. He suffers, as the lovers of traditional Sufi poems. Bahá’u’lláh typically writes:

*My groans proclaim the secret of my heart;*

*My tearful eyes reveal the riddle of my soul.* (v.18)

However, whereas the Sufi lover suffers because his Beloved is cruel, remains far from him, and often mocks him for his love, in this Poem the Beloved is close to His lover, and has pity for him, and welcomes his faithfulness. As has been said, it is the hostility of his fellow-beings, that makes the lover suffer. Wherever the lover goes, he is a prisoner, a description reminiscent of other words written by Bahá’u’lláh about Himself: “*At all times He was at the mercy of the wicked doers. At one time they cast Him into prison, at another they banished Him, and at yet another hurried Him from land to land*” (Súriy-i-Haykal: Queen Victoria 92, sec.1, para.177). He wrote moreover in the Kitáb-i-Íqán: “*All this generation could offer Us were wounds from its darts, and the only cup it proffered to Our lips was the cup of its venom. On our neck We still bear the scar of chains, and upon Our body are imprinted the evidences of an unyielding cruelty.*” [KI 190]

## *Springtime motifs and nature tropes*

The opening verse of this ode recites: “*At dawn (saḥar) the Friend came to my bed.*” This beginning resembles a *maṭla‘*, the first verse of a *ghazal*. The Beloved visits the lover at dawn, when he is still asleep. It is a common poetical device among the Sufis. For example Rúmí wrote:



Yesterday at dawn (*saḥarí*) passing by the Beloved said to me, “You are distraught and unaware; how long will this go on?” (*Mystical poems* 1:110, no.130, v.1; *Díván*, “*Ghazalyát*,” no.1022, v.1)

Rúmí writes moreover:

One morning (*saḥarí*) He whose sleep  
The angels envy came and looked into my heart.

He wept and I wept, as long as the dawn arrived.

They asked: “Of the two, who is the lover?” (*Díván*,  
“*Rubá’yát*,” part. 2)

Also Fátimih Zarrín-Táj Baraghání (ca.1817–1852), known as Qurratu’l-‘Ayn, Consolation of the Eyes, or more frequently as Ṭáhirih, the Pure, famous among the Bahá’ís as one of the Báb’s Letters of the Living, and among the Persians as a refined poetess, writes in one of her poems:

As in sleep I lay at the dawn of day that cruel Charmer came  
to me,

And in the grace of His form and face the dawn of the morn  
I seemed to see. (qtd. in Browne, *A Persian Anthology* 70-1)

Dawn, “in the Islamic tradition, time par excellence of ecstasy and visions” (Saccone, “*Sensi e soprasensi*” 41), associated as it is to the rising sun after the nocturnal darkness, symbolizes the return of spirit in a lifeless world. Bahá’u’lláh was born in Teheran on 12 November 1817 at dawn and seems to have a strong personal tie with this time of the day. Rúḥíyyih Rabbani (1910–2000), the wife of Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith, writes in this regard:

He had, evidently, a deep association with that hour of the day when the life of the world is repoured into it. How could He not have? Was He not the Hermit of Sar-Galú, where He spent many months in a lonely stone hut

perched on a hilltop; the sunrise must have often found Him waiting and watching for its coming, His voice rising and falling in the melodious chants of His supplications and compositions. At how many dawns He must have heard the birds of the wilderness wake and cry out when the first rays of the sun flowed over the horizon and witnessed in all its splendor the coming alive of creation after the night. (*Bahá'í World* vol. 9, 792)

The time of dawn has deep spiritual meanings in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. It is the beginning of the manifestation of the potentialities of the new Day of God, it is the beginning of a new, personal and collective, spiritual journey. And, since advanced mystics “*see the end and the beginning as one*” (SV15), dawn is a precious time of multi-potentiality, a special time of communion with the Divine. Bahá'u'lláh wrote:

*For Thine ardent lovers Thou hast, according to Thy decree, reserved, at each daybreak (ashár), the cup of Thy remembrance, O Thou Who art the Ruler of rulers! These are they who have been so inebriated with the wine of Thy manifold wisdom that they forsake their couches in their longing to celebrate Thy praise and extol Thy virtues, and flee from sleep in their eagerness to approach Thy presence and partake of Thy bounty.*  
(PM142, sec.85, para.2; Munáját 87)

Verse 9 also is significant for its nature tropes:

*Thine eyes shed rubies of blood, whereby*

*The eye of the twilight hath turned pomegranate red.*

The tears of blood similar to rubies are part of the clichés of Persian mystical poetry. For example Majdúd Saná'í (d. ca.1141), the earliest Persian mystical lyric poet, writes:

When that purest pearl moves away from me,

It befits me to shed rubies from my eyes. (*Diván*,  
“Ghazalyát,” no.241, v.7)

This distich is a play on colours: the lover sheds tears similar to rubies and the twilight shares his pain taking on the hues of a pomegranate. Many Persian poets use these images. For example Hafiz writes:

O gardener (God, the Creator)! drive me not away like the  
wind (portionless) from the door of the garden (of  
existence);

For the water (of dominion and of creation) of the rose-  
bed, like the ruddy pomegranate (*gulnár*), with the  
(bloody) tears of mine is. (*Diván* 104, “Ghazalyát,” no.40,  
v.6)

As to colours, in the Bahá’í Writings the adjective “Crimson,” that is “a rich deep red colour inclining to purple” (OED4:23), is often associated with the Manifestation of God or with exalted spiritual realms. Bahá’u’lláh mentions the

*crimson Tree* (sidratu’l-ḥamrá) (*Lawḥ-i-Siyyid-i-Mihdíy-i-Daháji* 196; *Majmú’ih* 121, para.6);

*Crimson Pillar* (rukni’l-ḥamrá’) (GDM72, para.05; *Jawáhir* 82);

*crimson sea* (al-baḥra’l-lujjí al-ḥamrá’), to refer to Himself (GDM60, para.83; *Jawáhir* 69);

*crimson wine* (*khamru’l-ḥamrá’*) proffered by Thy snow-white hand, to refer to His own Words (*Súriy-i-Haykal* 13, 1:23; *Áthár* 1:7);

*Crimson Ark* (as-safínatu’l-ḥamrá’), to refer to His Cause (KA50, para.84);

*Crimson Book* (ṣaḥífiy-i-ḥamrá’), to refer to the Book of His Covenant (ESW32; *Lawḥ-i-Mubáarak-i-Khaṭáb* 24);

*Crimson Light* (núru'l-ḥamrá') enveloping the Sinai of Our Revelation (Súriy-i-Bayán 280, sec. CXXIX, para.7; *Muntakhabátí* 180);

*crimson cloud* (ghamámu'l-ḥamrá'), upon which “*The Promised One Himself hath come down from heaven, seated ... with the hosts of revelation on His right, and the angels of inspiration on His left*” (Súriy-i-Vafá 182; *Majmú'ih* 113, para.7);

*crimson land* (arḍu'l-ḥamrá') (GDM21, para.26; *Jawáhir* 26; Lawḥ-i-Fu'ád 173, sec.4, para.1);

*Crimson Hill* (arḍi kathíbi'l-ḥamrá'), to refer to exalted spiritual realms (Súriy-i-Mulúk 185, sec.5, para.2; Súratu'l-Mulúk 2);

*crimson Spot* (al-baq'atu'l-mubáratu'l-ḥamrá') (KA56, para.100);

*crimson ink* (midáda'l-aḥmari) (HW, Arabic. no.71), to refer to the blood of the martyrs.

Verse 16 recites:

*The sky has filled its skirt (dámán) with pearls (gawhar),  
That it may lay it down at the feet of Thy Majesty.*

The skirt filled with pearls is among the clichés used by Persian mystical poets. For example Rúmí writes:

She filled her skirt (*dámán*) with pearls (*gawhar*) and sat down at his bedside. (Díván, “*Ghazalyát*,” no.2041, v.5)

This poetical description of the Beloved's beauty, evoking a nocturnal sky spangled with stars, is reminiscent of the following words in a meditation by Bahá'u'lláh: “*Every time I lift up mine eyes unto Thy heaven, I call to mind Thy highness and Thy loftiness, and Thine incomparable glory and greatness*” (PM271, sec.76, para.15). While writing this verse, Bahá'u'lláh may

have gone with His mind back to the clear night skies of His adolescence, when He visited the mountain villages of Afchih and Tákur, where His family had two Mansions, or Yálrúd, the native town of His beloved wife Ásíyih (ca.1820-1886), known as Navváb, located in the Alborz range.

### Mystical themes

Verse 28 recites:

*I come with no veil before Thee to behold, O Almighty,  
Thy Face beyond any mortal frame, O Unique One.*

This distich has strong mystical connotations. The Beloved is invoked as “*Unique One* (Aḥad)” and “*Almighty* (Kirdigár).” The lover goes “*with no veil*” in front of the Beloved, so that he may behold Him “*beyond any mortal frame* (bí-jasad, lit. without body).” This image also belongs to the *malámatí* vein, because the Persian adjective *bí-ḥijáb* has a connotation of immodesty. The German Orientalist Annemarie Schimmel (1922-2003) remarks that Islam “strictly prohibits nudity” (Deciphering 93). She then adds:

As contrary as nudity is to strict Islamic prescriptions, it is nevertheless used as a metaphor in mystical language, and authors like Bahá-i Walad (d. 1231) and his son, Jaláluddín Rúmí, as well as Násir Muhammad ‘Andalíb and Siráj Awrangábádí in eighteenth-century India (to mention only a few), used this term to point to the moment when the everyday world and its objects have, as it were, been discarded and only God and the soul are left in a union attained by the absolute “denudation” of the soul. (Deciphering 94)

The strong mystical hues of this distich suggest that this locution, “*with no veil*,” or naked, could be interpreted as wholly detached from anything but the Beloved, “*detached from*

*all else but Him*” (Súriy-i-Mulúk 204, sec.5, para.47). It is reminiscent of an aphorism of the Persian Hidden Words reciting: “*Pass beyond the baser stages of doubt and rise to the exalted heights of certainty. Open the eye of truth, that thou mayest behold the veiless Beauty (Jamál-i-mubín) and exclaim: Hallowed be the Lord, the most excellent of all creators!*” (no.9; Kalimát-i-Maknúnih 426). If the lover wants to behold the Beloved without veils, first he must remove his own veils, that is detach himself from whatever may bind him to the lower, animal, level of his existence and separate him from his higher, spiritual, level.

### Theological themes

Verse 15 says:

*O Thou, by Whose Face the sun is enlightened in the sky,  
O Thou, by Whose love the essence of peace is unsettled.*

The description of the Beloved takes in this verse mystical and theological connotations. When the Most Great Spirit shows Its face, that is reveals Itself, the Sun of Reality, the Manifestation of God, rises in the world. His light enlightens the sun itself in the sky. The Manifestation of God is “*the central Orb of the universe, its Essence and ultimate Purpose*” (KI99-100, para.106). Because of Him “*the essence of peace is unsettled.*” In the Beloved the opposites coincide. According to the Sufis the coincidence of opposites is only realized in Being in Itself, bringing “*all opposites together in a single reality*” (Chittick 112). An aspect of this coincidence is the harmonious balance between elements which human beings often see as conflicting with one another, as for example love and reason, war and peace. Rúmí writes:

The mind cannot compass its [the pen of the Beloved] description, for in it is the union of opposites, a composition without composition, amazing! — constrained yet with free will. (*Mystical Poems* 2:94, no.324, v.9)

Bahá'u'lláh explains that the coincidence of opposites is realized in the Manifestation of God: “*I bear witness that in His person solidity and fluidity have been joined and combined*” (PM48, sec.38, para.3). He explains moreover in the Kitáb-i-Íqán:

*These Prophets and chosen Ones of God are the recipients and revealers of all the unchangeable attributes and names of God. They are the mirrors that truly and faithfully reflect the light of God. Whatsoever is applicable to them is in reality applicable to God, Himself, Who is both the Visible and the Invisible ... Through the manifold attributes of these Essences of Detachment, Who are both the first and the last, the seen and the hidden, it is made evident that He Who is the Sun of Truth is “the First and the Last, the Seen, and the Hidden.”*<sup>6</sup> (KI142-3, para.151)

He alludes to this concept in the following verse in another Poem:

*Through His wisdom, the coincidence of opposites is made manifest,*

*Now Love becomes a servant, now the Intellect a porter.*

*(Sáqí, bi-dih ábí, verse 19)*<sup>7</sup>

Verse 15, however, can also have a simpler interpretation. Such is the ardour of the lover's love for the Beloved, that his heart is disquieted. Bahá'u'lláh uses a similar metaphor in His Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat describing Apollonius of Tyana, a philosopher and an ascetic of the first century AD, to whom He ascribes the following words: “*My heart is seized with alarm, my limbs tremble, I have lost my reason and my mind hath failed me*” (148).

## Scriptural themes

Bahá'u'lláh mentions “pilgrims and companions” (v.32). Moreover He writes in verse 30:

*O Mystery of God! Draw forth Thy hand from the Invisible.*

As to “*pilgrims and companions* (muhájarín-u anṣár),” it is a reference to the followers of Muhammad, immediately after the Hegira. Pilgrims are those followers who accompanied Him in His relocation from Mecca to Medina. Companions are the inhabitants of the town who supported Him.<sup>8</sup> As has been previously said, these two words are mentioned together in the Koran (9:18 and 101). Bausani explains the meaning of the Hegira,

erroneously sometimes called “flight” to Medina. The Arabic word *hiġra*, from which our vulgar hegira comes, mainly conveys, beside the concept of “leaving” and “emigrating,” the idea of “rescission of tribal ties;” in other words it has technical and juridical connotations. (“Religione islamica” 376)

Distich 32 seems to imply that the effects of the Revelation will become manifest in all those who will accompany the new Manifestation in His new “Hegira” and will assist Him, cutting all ties with their former tradition. This verse also conveys an autobiographical reference. Bahá'u'lláh also has left His Mecca, Teheran. He has been followed by a few faithful relatives, His first wife Navváb, His nine years old son, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, His seven years old daughter, Báhiyyih Khánum (1846–1932), His loyal true brother, Mírzá Músa (ca.1819–1887), known as Áqáy-i-Kalím, and His young half-brother, Mírzá Muḥammad-Qulí (1837–1910), who was faithful to Bahá'u'lláh even after His passing (see GPB108, sec.7, para.10). In Baghdad He found only a handful of faithful companions who assisted Him. Otherwise He was completely alone. He describes His loneliness as follows: “*Upon Our arrival in ‘Iráq We found the Cause of God sunk in deep apathy and the breeze of divine revelation stilled.*



*Most of the believers were faint and dispirited, nay utterly lost and dead” (Ishraqát 130).*

As to hemistich 30, it is an allusion to the white hand outstretched by Moses (see Savi 184-6) and it can be more easily understood in the light of the Koranic episode to which it refers. As in the Bible (Ex. 4:2-9), the Koran relates that, when God assigned to Moses the mission of rescuing the Jews from their Egyptian captivity, He vouchsafed upon Him a thaumaturgic power as a proof of His divine mission.

*“... Now, what is that in thy right hand, O Moses?”*

*Said he, “It is my staff on which I lean, and with which I beat down leaves for my sheep, and I have other uses for it.”*

*He said, “Cast it down, O Moses!”*

*So he cast it down, and lo! it became a serpent that ran along.*

*He said, “Lay hold on it, and fear not: to its former state will we restore it.”*

*“Now place thy right hand (yad) to thy arm-pit: it shall come forth white, but unhurt:- another sign! -*

*That We may shew thee the greatest of our signs*

*Go to Pharaoh, for he hath burst all bounds.” (20:17-24)*

The Sufi masters maintained that “Whiteness signifies the First Intellect, which is the center of the primal cloud (*‘amá’*). It is the first thing that emerges from the blackness of the unseen and is the greatest source of light within that realm, being described as whiteness, in juxtaposition to the blackness of the unseen” (Nurbakhsh 4:54).

Bahá’u’lláh offers a key for the explanation of the episodes of Moses’ life in the Kitáb-i-Íqán. He writes: *“Armed with the rod of celestial dominion, adorned with the white hand of*

*divine knowledge, and proceeding from the Párán of the love of God, and wielding the serpent of power and everlasting majesty, He [Moses] shone forth from the Sinai of light upon the world”* (KI11, para.12). In other Tablets Bahá’u’lláh ascribes to Himself the sign of the White Hand: *“This is Mine hand which God hath turned white for all the worlds to behold”* (qtd. in GPB 169, sec.10, para.12).

## Didactic themes

The importance of three main concepts emerges from this poem: faithfulness, tribulations and acceptance.

As to faithfulness, the covenant of love that binds the lover to his Beloved is eternal. The lover has tied his *“heart to the curl of Thy tresses,”* so *“That it may not be unloosed till the Judgement Day”* (v.25). This covenant implies for the lover to entirely forgets his self, and to make whatever his Beloved wishes. Historical examples of people who betrayed this covenant of love are, in the Christian Dispensation, Judas Iscariot and, in the Bahá’í Dispensation, Muḥammad ‘Alí (ca. 1853–1937), the unfaithful son of Bahá’u’lláh, who did not accept the last will clearly set down by his Father, and rebelled against ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, His appointed Successor. In this man the selfish love for power, that in him took the form of a desire of being the successor of his Father in the place of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, prevailed over his love for the divine Beauty of his own Father. Bahá’u’lláh also writes:

*My soul won’t cut the lace of Thy love,  
Should it be beheaded with a deadly blade.* (v.24)

*Should I be slaughtered a myriad times,  
Still I wouldn’t rebel against Thy love.* (v.26)

It is another symbolic and hyperbolic description of the lover’s faithfulness. This prerequisite is mentioned by Bahá’u’lláh in

the introduction of the Four Valleys: “*Have they not told thee that faithfulness (istiḡāmat) is a duty on those who follow the mystic way, that it is the true guide to His Holy Presence?*” (FV74, Chihār Vádí 141). It is also mentioned in the Persian Hidden Words:

*The first call of the Beloved is this: O mystic nightingale! Abide not but in the rose-garden of the spirit. O messenger of the Solomon of love! Seek thou no shelter except in the Sheba of the well-beloved, and O immortal phoenix! dwell not save on the mount of faithfulness. Therein is thy habitation, if on the wings of thy soul thou soarest to the realm of the infinite and seekest to attain thy goal.* (HW no.1)

Rúmi writes in this vein:

He said: “Where is calamity?” Said I: “In the neighborhood of thy love”

He said: “How fare are you there?” Said I: “In steadfastness (*istiḡāmat*).” (*Selected Poems* 57, 14:11)

Reynold Alleyne Nicholson (1868–1945), the well-known eminent English orientalist, remarks that the Sufis ascribed many meanings to the word faithfulness (*istiḡāmat*), as for example “Continuance, the non preference of anything to God” (237). This meaning seems pertinent in this verse. The lover does not put anything before God, not even His life. Ḥafīz writes in this vein:

If desire be thine that the (true) beloved should not (by severing asunder attachments to thee) break the covenant,

Keep (with respect) the end of the cord so that (the covenant) he may preserve. (*Díván* 294, “Ghazalyát,” no.146, v.2)

Ḥafīz moreover ascribes the following words to the Beloved: “respect the bond: be faithful in love, and I will not fail” (qtd. in Nicholson 275).

As to tribulations, Bahá’u’lláh writes: “*my spirit yearns after Thy tribulations*” (v.23). A Sufi cliché of the lover is that he is willing to face every kind of pain and tribulation for his Beloved’s sake. This concept is expressed by many Persian mystical poets, as for example Saná’í, who wrote:

*That heart which stands aloof from pain and woe*

*No seal or signature of Love can show.* (qtd. in Browne, *A Literary History* 2:322)

Bahá’u’lláh repeatedly expounded this idea in His Writings:

*But for the tribulations which are sustained in Thy path, how could Thy true lovers be recognized; and were it not for the trials which are borne for love of Thee, how could the station of such as yearn for Thee be revealed? Thy might beareth me witness! The companions of all who adore Thee are the tears they shed, and the comforters of such as seek Thee are the groans they utter, and the food of them who haste to meet Thee is the fragments of their broken hearts.* (PM155, sec.92, para.1)

The lover accepts everything out of his love for the Beloved. He accepts the “*pitiless sword*” (v.22) or as He later said: “*Behold Thou my head ready to fall before the sword (sayf) of Thy Will, my neck prepared to bear the chains of Thy Desire, my heart yearning to be made a target for the darts of Thy Decree (qaḏá) ...*” (PM95, sec.60, para.1; Munáját 69). He loves suffering (*dard*), because He knows that “*But for tribulations (baláyá), how could the assured be distinguished from the doubters among Thy servants? They who have been inebriated with the wine of Thy knowledge, these, verily, hasten to meet every manner of adversity (baláyá) in their longing to pass into*

*Thy presence*” (PM9, sec.6, para.2; Munáját 11). The lover clings to the decree (*qaḍá*) of God and his heart yearns “*to be made a target for the darts of ... [His] Decree (qaḍá’)*” (PM95, sec.60, para.1; Munáját 69), a decree (*qaḍá’*) that is “*the sole hope of them that have recognized Thy truth*” (PM220, sec.133, para.1). He wants to suffer (*balá*), because He is aware of the beneficial effects of the pains of mystical love. Later on He went so far as stating: “*Perish that lover who discerneth between the pleasant and the poisonous in his love for his beloved! Be thou satisfied with what God hath destined (qaḍay) for thee*” (PM11, sec.8, para.2; Munáját 13).

Submission to the Decree of God is emphasized as a sign of love in many other Writings by Bahá’u’lláh, as for example: “*O Thou Whose tests (balá’) are a healing medicine to such as are nigh unto Thee, Whose sword (sayf) is the ardent desire of all them that love Thee, Whose dart is the dearest wish of those hearts that yearn after Thee, Whose decree (qaḍá’) is the sole hope of them that have recognized Thy truth!*” (PM220-1, sec.133, para.1; Munáját 148). In *Gems of Divine Mysteries*, in the City of Love and Rapture, He writes that the lover “*standeth ready to obey whatsoever His Lord should please to decree as to his beginning and his end*” (GDM29, para.38). This verse is reminiscent of Psalm 119:31 (KJB): “*I cling to your decrees; LORD, do not put me to shame. I have stuck unto thy testimonies: O LORD, put me not to shame.*” This Psalm is described in the Italian Catholic Jerusalem Bible [Bibbia di Gerusalemme] as “A Praise of the Divine Law” (1256).

As to acceptance, Bahá’u’lláh writes in verse 33:

*Attire their heads with the crown of acceptance,  
Gird up their temples with the girdle of love.*

The word acceptance (*qabúl*) seems to be used in Bahá’u’lláh’s Writings with at least three different connotations. The most frequent meaning is God’s acceptance of human deeds:

*Thus with steadfast steps we may tread the Path of certitude, that perchance the breeze that bloweth from the meads of the good-pleasure of God may waft upon us the sweet savours of divine acceptance (qabúl), and cause us, vanishing mortals that we are, to attain unto the Kingdom of everlasting glory. (KI134, para.146; KMI104)*

*Occupy thyself, during these fleeting days of thy life, with such deeds as will diffuse the fragrance of Divine good pleasure, and will be adorned with the ornament of His acceptance (qabúl). (ESW76; Lawḥ-i Mubáarak-i-Khaṭáb 51)*

The second meaning is man's acceptance of God's decrees:

*What is it that could have induced them to reconcile themselves (qabúl namúdiḥ-and) to these grievous trials, and to refuse to put forth a hand to repel them? (ESW75; Lawḥ-i Mubáarak-i-Khaṭáb 51)*

Thus this verse could mean that the Beloved will adorn all heads with the crown of acceptance (*qabúl*), so that everyone “*instead of complaining,*” will render “*thanks unto God, and amidst the darkness of their anguish*” will reveal “*naught but radiant acquiescence to His will*” (KI235, para.264).

The third meaning is the human acceptance of the Manifestation of God:

*Hath, from the foundation of the world until the present day, any Light or Revelation shone forth from the dayspring of the will of God which the kindreds of the earth have accepted (qabúl namúdiḥ), and Whose Cause they have acknowledged? (ESW92; Lawḥ-i Mubáarak-i-Khaṭáb 61)*

When the Manifestation of God reveals Himself to the world, the highest form of acceptance (*qabúl*) is to accept the fact that God has decreed the beginning of a new Dispensation.

Bahá'u'lláh writes in this regard: “*True belief in God and recognition of Him cannot be complete save by acceptance (tabaṣṣur) of that which He hath revealed and by observance of whatsoever hath been decreed by Him and set down in the Book by the Pen of Glory*” (Tajalliyát 50; Majmú'ih 27, para.11). Interestingly, in this verse acceptance is associated with love, the central theme of the whole poem.

### Autobiographical references

This poem is also rich in autobiographical references, see for example the following verses:

*Now is placed in fetters thy neck, as if thou werest a rebellious*

*Servant, now, bound in chains, thou art hurried to the bazaar.*

*Now thou are wronged in the hands of the oppressor,*

*Now thou spendest days and nights in the prison of cruelty. (v.6-7)*

*I was dragged through mountains and plains (v.20)*

*The Birds of Eternity (Aṭyár-i-Baqá) returned to their nest*

*We remained downtrodden and wretched on earth. (v.29)*

As to the words “*Now is placed in fetters thy neck, as if thou werest a rebellious Servant,*” Bahá'u'lláh wrote in His Tablet to Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh:

*For them who are endued with discernment, and whose eyes are fixed upon the Sublime Vision, it is no secret that I have been, most of the days of My life, even as a slave, sitting under a sword (sayf<sup>un</sup>) hanging on a thread, knowing not whether it would fall soon or late upon him. (Súriy-i-Haykal 136, sec.1, para.273; Áthár 1:87)*

As to the sentence “now, bound in chains, thou art hurried to the bazaar,” it is reminiscent of that terrible day, in August 1853, when Bahá’u’lláh was brought to the prison of Síyáh-Chál, a day He Himself described as follows:

*We were in no wise connected with that evil deed, and Our innocence was indisputably established by the tribunals. Nevertheless, they apprehended Us, and from Niyávaran, which was then the residence of His Majesty, conducted Us, on foot and in chains, with bared head and bare feet, to the dungeon of Tīhrán. A brutal man, accompanying Us on horseback, snatched off Our hat, whilst We were being hurried along by a troop of executioners and officials. We were consigned for four months to a place foul beyond comparison. (ESW20)*

The “oppressors” could be all His adversaries about whom He wrote in those days, that “with one consent [they] have fallen upon me” (PM234, sec.145, para.1). And the prison of cruelty could be the Síyáh-Chál, “a place foul beyond comparison” (ESW20). And also in later years He was imprisoned, as He wrote about Himself: “He hath, during the greater part of His life, been sore-trying in the clutches of His enemies. His sufferings have now reached their culmination in this afflictive Prison, into which His oppressors have so unjustly thrown Him” (GWB58, sec. XXIII, para.4). As to verse 20, it is reminiscent of Bahá’u’lláh’s travel from Teheran to Baghdad, which began in the heart of winter (12 January 1853–8 April 1853). First He passed through barren “plains (dasht),” but later on His caravan crossed the Saveh Pass and then the Sháh Pass through the Nahavand Mountains and finally Mount Zagros (see Ruhe 165-74). In this verse Bahá’u’lláh writes that the lover is “dragged through mountains (kúh) and plains (dasht),” a condition He later described in the *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*: “At one time I found Myself on the heights of mountains (jibál); at another in the depths of the prison (sijn) of Tā (Tīhrán), in chains and fetters” (ESW78; *Lawḥ-i Mubárak-i-Khaṭáb* 53).



The lover is “*drawn in front of the wicked (fujjár),*” a condition He later described as follows: “*At one time they cast Him into prison, at another they banished Him, and at yet another hurried Him from land to land*” (ESW63-4). As to verse 29, it has both mystical and historical connotations. In this verse Bahá’u’lláh uses a locution very similar to a locution used in the Kitáb-i-Íqán, “*Birds of Eternity (Aṭyár-i-Baqá ... Ḥamámát-i-Azalíyat)*” (KI17, para.16; KMI14; see also KI24, para.24, KMI 19). In those contexts the locution refers to the Manifestations of God. Perhaps in verse 29 it refers not only to the Báb, martyred in Tabríz on 9 July 1851, but also to all those believers who “*with ... love ... devotion ... exultation and holy rapture ... sacrificed their lives in the path of the All-Glorious*” (KI226, para.251), the Bábí martyrs. Bahá’u’lláh wrote about them:

*Their breasts were made targets for the darts of the enemy, and their heads adorned the spears of the infidel. No land remained which did not drink the blood of these embodiments of detachment, and no sword that did not bruise their necks.* (KI224, para.250)

This verse seems to reflect the feelings of a Person Who, after having seen all those companions being slaughtered in the path of God and the following, almost immediate, decline of the Bábí Community, perhaps wished to have gone He Himself together with them. It seems to convey the same discouragement described in the Fire Tablet, revealed many years after in ‘Akká. But it is only a flash. Immediately after He claims:

*The time hath come for the banner to be hoisted.*

*O Mystery of God! Draw forth Thy hand from the Unseen.*

And the atmosphere of certitude and eagerness, typical of this poem is immediately renewed.

## A slow reading of the poem

The following thoughts are offered only as personal reflections on the verses revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, whose perusal may evoke remembrances of His own Writings as well as of verses of earlier poets.

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*Huva'l-Mughní fí kull-i-shá'n<sup>9</sup>*

*He is the Provider in all circumstances*

The poem is preceded, as often happens in the Muslim as well as Bahá'í literature, by an invocation of a name of God. In this case Bahá'u'lláh uses the attribute of God *al-Mughní*, the Enricher, defined by the British Orientalist, translator and lexicographer Edward William Lane (1801–1876) as “as a name of God ... He who satisfies, or contents, whom He will, of his servants” (Lane 6:87). It is one of the ninety-nine “Most Beautiful Names” that Muslim theologians have discovered in the Koran, and precisely the 89th. It is a direct acknowledgment of the Divine Providence, which suffices to everything in any circumstance of life and an indirect statement of submission to the Divine Decree, as befits One Who has just received the intimation of such a momentous Mission. Bahá'u'lláh proclaims His submission to the Divine Will in many Writings. For example He writes:

*Every time I hold my peace, and cease to extol Thy wondrous virtues, Thy Spirit impelleth me to cry out before all who are in Thy heaven and on Thy earth; and every time I am still, the breaths wafted from the right hand of Thy will and purpose pass over me, and stir me up, and I find myself to be as a leaf which lieth at the mercy of the winds of Thy decree, and is carried away whithersoever Thou dost permit or command it. Every man of insight who considereth what hath been revealed*

*by me, will be persuaded that Thy Cause is not in my hands, but in Thy hands, and will recognize that the reins of power are held not in my grasp but in Thy grasp, and are subject to Thy sovereign might. (PM306-7, sec.79, para.10)*

*Grievous as is My plight, O God, My Well-Beloved, I render thanks unto Thee, and My Spirit is grateful for whatsoever hath befallen me in the path of Thy good-pleasure. I am well pleased with that which Thou didst ordain for Me, and welcome, however calamitous, the pains and sorrows I am made to suffer. (Súriy-i-Damm 89-90, sec. XXXIX, para.1)*

The Persian-Arabic script *مغنی* (*M-gh-n-i*) could also be read as *Mughanní*, “A singer” (Steingass 1282). Ḥafiz ascribes this attribute to God Himself. He writes:

Saki by the independence of profligates, (I conjure thee) drink wine.

So that, thou mayst hear the song of the Singer (*Mughanní*), God, the Independent One (*Huva'l-Ghaní*) (*Díván* 906, “*Ghazalyát*,” no.557, v.6; *Divan*, “*Ghazalyát*” 494, no.479, v.6)

Ḥafiz wrote a 44 verse *Mathnaví* entitled *Mughanní Námih*, translated by Wilberforce-Clark “The Minstrel Rhyme” (*Díván* 993-6). Carlo Saccone, a refined Italian translator of Ḥafiz’s *opera omnia*, remarks: “The cantor (*moghanni*) is similar in his meanings and functions to the cupbearer” (“Note” 218n1) in the *Sáqí Námih*, that is, “the initiator into the mysteries of wine and Love” (*ibid.* 216n1).

## 1

*Saḥar ámad bi bistar-am Yár káy*<sup>10</sup>

*Shúrídíh zi ‘ishq vay dil-afkár.*

*At dawn the Friend came to my bed:*

*“O fool for love, O broken heart,*

The trope of dawn has been previously explained. In the second hemistich the lover is described as *shúrídih*. This adjective comes from *shúr*, a term described by Javad Nurbakhsh (1926–2008), the Master of the Nimatullahi Sufi Order, as: “*shur* ... frenzy ... a state which accompanies excitement and sometimes out-of-self-ness, occurring to the wayfarer on hearing God’s utterance or in the state of dancing” (15:121). Francis Joseph Steingass (1825–1903), the German linguist expert on Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit who authored the most famous Persian–English dictionary, defines *shúrídih* as “Disturbed; mixed; mad, frantic, desperately in love; faint, dejected” (766), that is crazy of love according to the traditional canons.

The image of the lover as a mad man is a typical motif of the love language of Persian lyric poetry. Whoever accepts such a painful feeling as love cannot be but insane, for he has renounced the primacy of reason and decided to follow the rules of the heart, which are quite different. ‘Aṭṭār writes:

Love is the fire (*átash*) here; but reason is the smoke.

When love has arrived, reason quickly takes to flight.

Reason in the madness of love (*sawdáy-i-‘ishq*) is no expert:

Love is not the business of native wit. (*Speech* 300, lines 3346-7; *Conference* 98)

Bahá’u’lláh repeatedly alludes to the madness of love in the Seven Valleys. For example, He writes: “*when the fire of love is ablaze, it burneth to ashes the harvest of reason*” (SV8); and also “*To merit the madness of love, man must abound in sanity; to merit the bonds of the Friend, he must be full of spirit*” (SV9). He also writes: “*The leviathan of love (nahang-i-‘ishq) swalloweth the master of reason (adib-i-‘aql) and destroyeth the*

*lord of knowledge (labīb-i-dāniṣh)*” (SV10; Haft Vádí 101). He refers to this concept in the following quotations from Sufi literature: the story of Majnún seeking for Laylí in the dust (SV6; see also ‘Aṭṭar, *Speech* 295, lines 3288-91) and the following couplet by Rúmí:

*Love’s a stranger to earth and heaven too;*

*In him are lunacies seventy-and-two.* (SV10; FV54)<sup>11</sup>

He also mentions love as madness in the Four Valleys through two quotations:

*Each moon, O my beloved, for three days I go mad;*

*Today’s the first of these – ‘Tis why thou seest me glad.*  
(Rúmí, qtd. in FV49)<sup>12</sup>

*The story of Thy beauty reached the hermit’s dell;*

*Crazed, he sought the Tavern where the wine they buy  
and sell.*

*The love of Thee hath leveled down the fort of patience,*

*The pain of Thee hath firmly barred the gate of hope as  
well.* (Sa’dí qtd. in FV55-6; *Chihár Vádí* 148)

More details on this subject may be found in Savi, *Towards the Summit* 112-5.

The lover is also described as *dil-afgár*, defined by Steingass as “heart-sore, heart-broken” (531), that is he is in that spiritual condition about which Bahá’u’lláh writes: “*the food (ghidhá) of them who haste to meet Thee is the fragments (qaṭa’ātu) of their broken hearts (ikbádi-him)*” (PM154, sec.92, para.1; *Munáját* 106).

## 2

*Ay az*<sup>13</sup> *baráy-am futádih bi-har sú’í,*<sup>14</sup>

*Vay dar ráh-am gashtih asír-i-har dyár.*

*O thou, who pinest for Me wherever thou art,  
And wherever thou art, liest imprisoned for Me,*

The lover suffers not only for the pains of his love, but also for the hostility of his fellow-beings, perhaps an autobiographical hint. Wherever he goes, he is a prisoner (*asír*), a description reminiscent of other words written by Bahá'u'lláh about Himself: “*At all times He was at the mercy of the wicked doers. At one time they cast Him into prison, at another they banished Him, and at yet another hurried Him from land to land*” (Súriy-i-Haykal: Queen Victoria 92, sec.1, para.177). He wrote moreover in the Kitáb-i-Íqán: “*All this generation could offer Us were wounds from its darts, and the only cup it proffered to Our lips was the cup of its venom. On our neck We still bear the scar of chains, and upon Our body are imprinted the evidences of an unyielding cruelty*” (KI190, para.208).

## 3

*Gah bar páy hamí píchídih<sup>15</sup> af‘í,  
Gah bar gardan-at zanjír-i-sharar-bár.*

*Now an asp twisted at thy foot,  
Now a rutilant chain at thy neck.*

Also in this distich the metaphors seems to suggest events of Bahá'u'lláh's life. The *af‘í*, “A large venomous serpent; viper; asp; basilisk” (Steingass 84), that is the asp around His foot, could be a hint at His many enemies within the Bábí Community, in the first place His half-brother Yaḥyá, about whom ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote:

*And still another of His trials was the hostility, the flagrant injustice, the iniquity and rebellion of Mírzá Yaḥyá. Although that Wronged One, that Prisoner, had through His loving-kindness nurtured him in His own bosom ever since his early years, had showered at every*

*moment His tender care upon him, exalted his name, shielded him from every misfortune, endeared him to them of this world and the next, and despite the firm exhortations and counsels of His Holiness, the Exalted One (the Báb) and His clear and conclusive warning; – “Beware, beware, lest the Nineteen Letters of the Living and that which hath been revealed in the Bayan veil thee!” yet notwithstanding this, Mírzá Yaḥyá denied Him, dealt falsely with Him, believed Him not, sowed the seeds of doubt, closed his eyes to His manifest verses and turned aside therefrom. Would that he had been content therewith! Nay, he even attempted to shed the sacred blood (of Bahá’u’lláh) and then raised a great clamor and tumult around him, attributing unto Bahá’u’lláh malevolence and cruelty towards himself. What sedition he stirred up and what a storm of mischief he raised whilst in the Land of Mystery (Adrianople)! At last, he wrought that which caused the Day-Star of the world to be sent an exile to this, the Most Great Prison, and sorely wronged, and in the West of this Great Prison He did set. (WT4-5)*

Bahá’u’lláh wrote moreover about his faithless relatives and companions in one of His Tablets to Maryam: “O Maryam! From the land of Ṭá (Teheran), after countless afflictions, We reached ‘Iráq at the bidding of the Tyrant of Persia, where, after the fetters of Our foes, We were afflicted with the perfidy of Our friends. God knoweth what befell Me thereafter!” (qtd. in GPB118, sec.7, para.31). He wrote in another passage: “I advance with My face set towards Him Who is the Almighty, the All-Bounteous, whilst behind Me glideth the serpent (ḥubáb)” (Lawh-i-Haykal: Naṣiri’-d-Dín Sháh 132, sec.1, para.265; *Áthár* 1:85).

The *sharar-bár*, “raining sparks, scintillating” (Steingass 741), that is rutilant chain could be a remembrance of the terrible

chains that were put at His neck in the Sáyáh-Chál. He wrote about them:

*Shouldst thou at some time happen to visit the dungeon of His Majesty the Sháh, ask the director and chief jailer to show thee those two chains, one of which is known as Qará-Guhar, and the other as Salásil. I swear by the Daystar of Justice that for four months this Wronged One was tormented and chained by one or the other of them. (ESW 77)*

‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes Bahá’u’lláh’s sufferings in those days as follows:

*... in Mázindarán, the blessed feet of the Abhá Beauty (may my life be offered up for His loved ones) were so grievously scourged as to bleed and be sore wounded. His neck also was put into captive chains and His feet made fast in the stocks. In every hour, for a period of fifty years, a new trial and calamity befell Him and fresh afflictions and cares beset Him. One of them: after having suffered intense vicissitudes, He was made homeless and a wanderer and fell a victim to still new vexations and troubles. In ‘Iráq, the Day-Star of the world was so exposed to the wiles of the people of malice as to be eclipsed in splendour. (WT 4)*

4

*Ay na-khuftih yik shabí bar<sup>16</sup> bistar-i-ráḥat,*

*Vay na-yásúdiḥ damí az fitniy-i-rúzgár.*

*O thou, who didn’t spend a night on a bed of ease, O thou*

*Who didn’t find a moment of relief from the woes of the world.*

This description of the lover, sleepless and afflicted by the travails of the world, beside meeting traditional poetical



criteria, seems a biographical reference to the ascetic life led by Bahá'u'lláh in those days of isolation. He wrote about those days: “*Many a night We had no food for sustenance, and many a day Our body found no rest*” (KI250, para.278). And in one of His Tablets to Maryam He wrote: “*There was not a night during which I rested in a safe place, not a morning in which I lifted My head from My couch with ease*” (“Lawḥ-i-Maryam” 357, v.6). Finally He wrote in His Tablet to Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh: “*How many the nights which found the beasts of the field resting in their lairs, and the birds of the air lying in their nests, while this Youth languished in chains and fetters with none to aid or succour Him!*” (Lawh-i-Haykal: Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh 97, sec.1, para.187)

## 5

*Zátash-i-áh-at*<sup>17</sup> *kabid-i-‘álam súkht,*

*Vaz dard-at chashm-i-jahán ádash-bár.*

*The heart of the world was burnt by the fire of thy wails,*

*The eye of the universe was consumed by the fire of thine affliction.*

The locution *kabid-i-‘álam súkht*, that literally means “the world burnt its liver out,” has been translated “*the heart of the world was burnt.*” In the Islamic world liver is the seat of passions, with love among them, whereas the heart is the seat of mystical knowledge. Therefore the Persian *kabid*-liver corresponds to the English heart (see Savi 107, Table 5, and 108). The locution *jigar súkhtan bar kasí* is explained by Steingass as “to feel pity for, to commiserate” (Steingass 366). Since *jigar* and *kabid* are synonyms, *kabid súkhtan* has the same meaning as *jigar súkhtan*. Therefore this locution could mean that the heart of the world was moved to pity. The image of the universe sympathizing with the lover for his pains of love is one of the clichés of Persian mystical poetry. Bahá'u'lláh writes in one of his Tablets to Maryam:

*I roamed the wilderness of resignation (ṣaḥrā-háy-i-taslím), traveling in such wise that in My exile every eye wept sore over Me, and all created things shed tears of blood (khún-i-dil) because of My anguish (kurbat). The birds of the air were My companions and the beasts of the field My associates. (qtd. in GPB120, sec.7, para.35; in Ishrāq Khávarih, Risálih 367)*

He also writes elsewhere: “*Should any one incline his inner ear, he would hear the cry and the wailing of all created things over what hath befallen Him Whom the world hath wronged*” (PM285, sec.176, para.44).

## 6

*Gah ṭawq bi-gardan chú ‘abdí<sup>18</sup> ‘áší,*

*Gah bá silsilih burdand hamí bar sar-i-bázár.*

*Now is placed in fetters thy neck, as if thou werest a rebellious*

*Servant, now, bound in chains, thou art hurried to the bazaar,*

Also the words of this distich seem a biographical reference (see above). Bahá’u’lláh was repeatedly put in chains. He wrote: “*At one time I found Myself on the heights of mountains; at another in the depths of the prison of Ṭá (Ṭihran), in chains and fetters*” (ESW78).

## 7

*Gah maẓlúm futádí tú<sup>19</sup> bi-dast-i-zálim*

*Gah dar sijn-i-jafá basí layl-u nahár.*

*Now thou art wronged in the hands of the oppressor,*

*Now thou spendest days and nights in the prison of cruelty.*

This distich has already been commented upon.

## 8

*Az dard-at dil-i-dústán dar átash,  
Vaz áh-at rukh-i-‘áshiqán tírih-u tár.*

*Thy pains set on fire the hearts of the friends,  
Thy groans darkened the faces of the lovers.*

This distich conveys concepts similar to those expressed in verse 5. Likewise Bahá’u’lláh wrote in one of His Tablets to Maryam: “*Were thou to examine carefully the matter, the eyes of might are weeping behind the Tabernacle of sinlessness and the people of glory are moaning in the precincts of loftiness. Unto this beareth witness the Tongue of truth and glory*” (“Lawḥ-i-Maryam” 357-8, v.8).

## 9

*Chashm-at az khún yáqút bar-afshánad,  
Zán gashtih hamí chashm-i-shafaq gulnár.*

*Thine eyes shed rubies of blood, whereby  
The eye of the twilight hath turned pomegranate red.*

This distich has already been commented upon.

## 10

*Bá ín hamih miḥnat kih bi-ráh-am dídí,  
Sard na-gashtí-u na-nálídí zár.*

*After so many toils thou met in My path,  
Thou doest not cool down, nor bitterly regret.*

Bahá’u’lláh hinted very often at His unswerving love in His Writings. He wrote for example:

*... how numerous the days whereon I had to face the assaults of the peoples against Me! At one time I found Myself on the heights of mountains; at another in the depths of the prison of Ṭa (Ṭíhrán), in chains and fetters. By the righteousness of God! I was at all times thankful unto Him, uttering His praise, engaged in remembering Him, directed towards Him, satisfied with His pleasure, and lowly and submissive before Him.*  
(ESW 78-79)

The originality of the description of the Beloved in this verse has been previously commented upon (see above *Love*).

## 11

*Az chíst kih imshab tú na-yásá'í,  
Vaz chíst kih gashtih badan-at chún tár.*

*Wherefore art thou restless tonight? Wherefore  
Hath thy body become as thin as a thread?*

Sleeplessness and loss of weight are signs of love. As to sleeplessness, according to the Sufi masters

whenever the heart of God's chosen one is stolen away by the beauty of the face of the Eternal and is burned by the fire of love, such a one cannot sleep at night, being overcome with a state of insomnia.

The gnostic said, "The lover's insomnia comes from the building up [accelerated alternation] of losing and finding." (Nurbakhsh 12:9)

In this vein Rúmí writes:

Love (*'ishq*) took away sleep (*khwáb*) from me — and love takes away sleep, for love purchases not the soul and mind (*ján-u khirad*) for so much as half a

barleycorn. (*Mystical Poems* 102, no.119, v.1; *Díván*, “Ghazalyát,” no.919)

As to weight loss, Rúmí writes:

I am like a chalice (*sághar*), my heart is bloody and my body emaciated. (*Díván*, “Ghazalyát,” no.478)

In this vein Bahá’u’lláh describes in the Seven Valleys “a lover who had sighed for long years in separation from his beloved, and wasted in the fire of remoteness”:

*From the rule of love, his heart was empty of patience,  
and his body weary of his spirit; he reckoned life  
without her as a mockery, and time consumed him away.  
How many a day he found no rest in longing for her;  
how many a night the pain of her kept him from sleep;  
his body was worn to a sigh, his heart’s wound had  
turned him to a cry of sorrow.* (SV13)

This distich presents clear biographical references. It is reminiscent of the following words by Bahá’u’lláh: “*During the days I lay in the prison of Tíhrán ... the galling weight of the chains and the stench-filled air allowed Me but little sleep*” (ESW22).

## 12

*Shab ghalṭí-u píchí tú hamí bar bálín,  
Ghalṭídan-u zárí<sup>20</sup> kih gazíd-ash már.*

*In the night thou tосsest and turnest on thy couch,  
Thou tосsest and groanest, as bitten by a snake.*

The sleeplessness of the lover has already been explained while commenting upon verse 11. Bahá’u’lláh uses the locution “as bitten by a snake” in a later Writing:

*Recall thou to mind My sorrows, My cares and anxieties, My woes and trials, the state of My captivity, the tears that I have shed, the bitterness of Mine anguish, and now My imprisonment in this far-off land. God, O Muşţafá, beareth Me witness. Couldst thou be told what hath befallen the Ancient Beauty, thou wouldst flee into the wilderness, and weep with a great weeping. In thy grief, thou wouldst smite thyself on the head, and cry out as one stung by the sting of the adder.*  
(GWB118, sec. LXII, para.1)

## 13

*Aknún zi-chih mí-píchí-u mí-náli*

*Vaz chih paríd-at-rang<sup>21</sup> hamí az rukhsár.*

*Why doest thou turn and moan, now?*

*Why doeth thy face turn pale?"*

Like sleeplessness and weight loss, also paleness is a typical cliché of Persian mystical poetry. Nurbakhsh explains: "The 'pallid face [*zard-i-rú'í*]' represents the suffering and anxiety experienced on the Path" (2:89n1). He explains moreover: "Yellowness is said to represent weakness in the travelling of the Path" (4:53). Rúmí writes:

In the hands of love (*'ishq*) who is not pale (*zard*), weak (*nazár*) and thin (*lághar*)? (Diván, "*Ghazalyát*," no.478)

And Ḥafiz says:

The yellow (grief-stricken) face (*rúy-i-zard*), and the grief-stained sigh are

For lovers, the evidence of affliction. (*Diván* 827,

"*Ghazalyát*," no.503, v.4; *Diván* 467, "*Ghazalyát*," no.403, v.4)

Saná'í explains:

The sun is ashamed before Her beauty;

The yellowness of its face displays the pain of its heart.

(qtd. in Nurbakhsh 4:53)

Bahá'u'lláh also uses this image in other Writings. He wrote in the Seven Valleys: “*He hath bound a myriad victims in his fetters, wounded a myriad wise men with his arrow. Know that every redness in the world is from his anger, and every paleness (zardí) in men’s cheeks (rukhsár) is from his poison*” (SV10-1; Haft Vádí 102). In this poem He writes:

*Do You wonder about Your lover’s plight?*

*You’ll discover its secrets in the pallor of his face (zardiy-i-rukhsár). (v.17)*

14

*Guftam: “Ay Yár, Ay Ṭábíb-i-ján-am,*

*Chih ‘ajab kih<sup>22</sup> ámadí bar sar-i-bímár.*

*I answered: “O Friend! O Healer of my soul!*

*How is it that Thou camest to this sick bed?*

The lover, aware of his abasement in front of the Beloved, is amazed by His morning visit. The Beloved’s visit at the bedside of the lover has been explained while commenting upon verse 12. In Sufi poetry, the Beloved is cruel, but He also is a *ṭabíb*, “a physician, doctor” (Steingass 810), that is a healer. ‘Aṭṭár writes:

bestow a remedy [*darmán*] upon him who is so sorrowful out of love. (“Il diletto degli amanti” 100, v.133)

Saccone remarks: “In Persian poetry the beloved is often called “the healer” (*tabib*), the only one who finds the “remedy” (*darmân*) for the pain or sickness of the lover” (“Il diletto degli amanti” note 119n49). Saccone writes moreover in this regard:

the poet-lover knows that the friend can hurt him, but he also is the only remedy that can heal the wounds of love. Therefore the beloved also wears the mask of the physician, in a verse reminiscent of the famous “love, that to no loved one remits his fee:”

Who became a lover and did not see the beloved in his condition?

O thou, I do not see any pain in thee, or else I would also see the healer

...

In the name of God, ask one day to my healer

When will this sick one have a nicer look?

In conclusion, the beloved sung by Hâfez wields full power, he kills and at the same time quickens, makes the lover sick and heals him, is cruel and bloodthirsty, but he alone appeases the anguish of the lovers. (*Maestro* 216)

Bahá'u'lláh uses the metaphor of the Friend, God, as a Healer in other Writings as well. For example, he writes in the Persian Hidden Words: “*The healer (ṭabīb) of all thine ills is remembrance of Me*” (no.32; *Kalimát-i-Maknúnih* 443). And He turns to God in prayer saying: “*O Thou Who art most dear to the hearts that long for Thee, and the Healer (ṭabīb) of the souls that have recognized Thee*” (PM299, sec.178, para.9; *Munáját* 200).

## 15

Ay az rúy-at *shams-i-samá'* *mushriq*

Vay az '*ishq-at nafs-i-sukún bí-qarár.*

O Thou, by Whose face the sun is enlightened in the sky,

O Thou, by Whose love the essence of peace is unsettled.

This verse has already been commented upon.



## 16

*Ásmán dámán-i-gawhar zán girift*  
*Tá kunad bar maqdam-i-‘izzat nithár.<sup>23</sup>*

*The sky has filled its skirt with pearls,*  
*That it may lay it down at the feet of Thy Majesty.*

This verse has already been commented upon.

## 17

*Gar Tú az hál-i-ḥabíb-at pursí*  
*Az zardíy-i-rukhsár shinú asrár.*

*Doest Thou wonder about Thy lover’s plight?*  
*Thou wilt discover its secrets in the pallor of his face.*

This verse continues the description of the sickness and paleness of the lover of verse 13. Zard literally means yellow, but, as Nicholson remarks, “yellow (*zard*) is the hue of paleness in the East, as in Italy” (“Notes” 294nXXXVII.10). Rúmi writes in the same vein:

Love has conquered the world, it has no colour.  
 But if it touches a body, that face turns yellow (*zardí*).  
 (*Díván*, “*Ghazalyát*,” no.544, v.6)

## 18

*Sirr-i-dil báshad zi áh-am mushtahar*  
*Ramz-i-ján záhir zi chashm-i-ashgbár.*

*My groans proclaim the secret of my heart;*  
*My tears reveal the riddle of my soul.*

The lover cannot be other but sorrowful. His groans reveal his love, like his tears reveal the pains of his spirit. In this vein Ḥafīz writes:

To such a degree, I wept that every one who passed (by me),  
 When he beheld running the pearl of our tears, spake  
 saying: "This stream what is?" (*Díván* 79, "Ghazalyát,"  
 no.25, v.3)

Bahá'u'lláh writes in this vein: "My sighs, O my God, proclaim the bitterness of mine anguish (balá'í), and the tears I shed attest my love for Thee (ḥubbí)" (PM29, sec.26, para.1, *Munáját* 26).

19

Gar *chih* zi 'ishq-at basí tír-i-jafá *khúrdam*  
 Ham *gashtih*<sup>24</sup> asír-i-dast-i-kuffár.

*In my love for Thee I received many an arrow  
 Of cruelty, I fell into infidel hands.*

The lover hit by the cruel arrows (*tír-i-jafá*) of the Beloved is a common image of Persian mystical poetry. For example Rúmí writes:

Thou art the falconer of heaven. Hit my heart with Thine  
 arrow (*tír*).

If Thou hittest me with thy cruel arrow (*tír-i-jafá*), I am  
 defenceless as the earth. (*Díván*, "Ghazalyát," no.1394,  
 v.16)

O friend, each word Thou utterest with Thy harp  
 Hits my troubled heart with a hundred cruel arrows (*tír-i-jafá*). (*Díván*, "Rubá'yát," part. 15)

Bahá'u'lláh used this image in other Writings: "The arrows (as-sahám) that transfix us in Thy path are the ornaments of our temples, and the spears (ramah) which pierce us in our love for

*Thee are as silk unto our bodies*” (PM217, sec.130, para.2; *Munáját* 146). He has “*fallen into the hands of the infidels (kuffár),*” or, as He wrote in a prayer: “*Thou seest, therefore, O Thou Beloved of the world, Him Who is dear to Thee in the clutches of such as have denied Thee, and beholdest Thy heart’s desire under the swords (suyúf) of the ungodly*” (PM38, sec.32, para.3; *Munáját* 32). We may find also in this verse biographical references. Bahá’u’lláh described in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* the tribulations that befell Him in that period: “*a number of people who have never inhaled the fragrance of justice, have raised the standard of sedition, and have leagued themselves against Us. On every side We witness the menace of their spears, and in all directions We recognize the shafts of their arrows*” (KI249, para.277).

## 20

*Gah bi-kashand-am bi-sar-i-kúh-u dar dasht*<sup>25</sup>

*Gah bi-barand-am dar maḥḍar-i-fujjár.*

*I was dragged through mountains and plains,*

*I was drawn in front of the wicked.*

This distich has already been commented upon.

## 21

*Gar gúyam án-chih bi-dídam az ‘ishq-at,*

*Al-battih zabán bi-mánad az guftár.*

*Should I tell what I saw in my love for There,*

*My tongue would grow weary of speaking.*

Bahá’u’lláh used a similar language also in other Writings to say that His trials are so dire that no one can describe them. For example:

*The pen (qalam) is powerless to depict and the tongue (lisán) faileth to describe the trials which We have suffered. (Lawḥ-i-Ra'ís 177, sec.3, para.28; Alváh-i-Mubárah 115)*

*Thou seest what hath befallen this Wronged One (mazlúm) at the hands of them that have not associated with Me, and who have arisen to harm and abase Me, in a manner which no pen can describe, nor tongue recount, nor can any Tablet sustain its weight. (ESW35; Lawḥ-i Mubárah-i-khaṭáb 26)*

*I beseech Thee by Him Who is Thy Most Great Name, Who hath been sorely afflicted by such of Thy creatures as have repudiated Thy truth, and Who hath been hemmed in by sorrows which no tongue can describe. (PM5, sec.3, para.1)*

*Thou beholdest my dwelling-place, and the prison into which I am cast, and the woes I suffer. By Thy might! No pen can recount them, nor can any tongue describe or number them. (PM10, sec.8, para.1)*

## 22

*Líkin na-nálam az tígh-i-jafá-t,<sup>26</sup> ay Dúst,*

*Dard-at-rá chú dil<sup>27</sup> gíram hamí andar kinár.<sup>28</sup>*

*I don't complain, O Friend, for Thy pitiless sword*

*And I cherish my pains for Thee as my own heart.*

This distich does not meet only poetical exigencies, it also expresses concepts that have been examined above: the lover is ready to face every kind of pain and tribulation for his Beloved's sake.

## 23

*Qaḍáy-at-rá chún ján gíram dar ághúsh,*

*Baláy-at-rá raván báshad kharídár.*<sup>29</sup>

*I embrace Thy decree with heart and soul,  
My spirit yearns after Thy tribulations.*

This verse has already been commented upon.

24

*Ján rishtiy-i-ḥubb-i-Tú hamí na-gusilad,  
Gar bi-burand-ash sar az khanjar-i-jarrár.*

*My soul won't cut the lace of Thy love,  
Should it be beheaded with a deadly blade.*

The theme of this verse has been explained while commenting upon verse 22.

25

*Nah chunán bastam dil bi kham-i-gísúy-at  
Kih shavad báz hamí tá Rúz-i-shumár.*

*I tied my heart to the curl of Thy tresses,  
That it may not be unloosed till the Judgment Day.*

The image of the hair of the Beloved is very common in Persian poetry. Laleh Mehree Bakhtiar, an Iranian-American Muslim author and clinical psychologist, writes:

The hair symbolizes the Divine Essence in Its aspect of the Hidden, the Inward; it is the symbol of multiplicity which hides unity. Multiplicity conceals the non-existence of things and thereby veils the Heart; but at the same time as the hair veils, it attracts Divine Grace and Divine Gifts. Like the face, the hair is veiled because of the sacred power it holds within itself. (68)

Persian poets describe the hair through several words. In this poem Bahá'u'lláh uses the locution *kham-i-gísú*. The word *gísú* means “A ringlet of hair, a forelock, a sidelock, curl” (Steingass 1109). Among the Sufis

This metaphor symbolizes the way of search for Union and Oneness with Absolute Beauty and the Divine Visage, to which terms such as “the invisible world,” “the unbreakable chord” (*‘orwat’ol wothqâ*), and the “strong rope” (*ḥabl al-matin*)” also allude. “And hold fast, all of you together, to the rope of God ...” (Koran, 111:103). (Nurbakhsh 1:111)

‘Aṭṭár writes in this regard:

In expectation of the musk (*mushk*) shed from the locks  
(*gísú*) which frame the sides of her face,

A hundred eyes looked eagerly upward,  
fixing their gaze upon the lofty heavens. (qtd. in  
Nurbakhsh1:111; *Díván*, “Qaṣídih,” no.1, v.49)

As to the word *kham*, it means “Crooked, bent, twisted, curled, curved; a curl, knot, ringlet ... that part of a noose which encircles the neck” (Steingass 473). In the Sufi world the locution *kham-i-zulf*, very similar to *kham-i-gísú*,

represents a Divine mystery of an abstruse and enigmatic nature, encountered by the mystic on the Way, and which he succeeds in surmounting only after great hardship. In this instance, it is absolutely necessary that the traveller be guided by a Perfect Master, lest he go astray. (Nurbakhsh 1:79)

Ḥafiz writes in this vein:

Thou spakest saying: “O Ḥáfiz! Thy distraught heart is  
where?”

In the meshes of that curl of tresses (*kham-i-gísú*), (it) we  
 have placed (Diván 700, “*Ghazalyát*,” no.413, v.14; *Diván*,  
 “*Ghazalyát*” 379, no.365, v.9)

‘*Aṭṭár* writes:

My heart (*dil-am*) on your tresses’ twists (*zulf bi-kham*)

Was caught, not just my heart,

My soul (*ján*) too, in the same crux

Became entangled. (*Diván*, “*Ghazalyát*,” no.253, v.1; qtd. in  
*Nurbakhsh* 1:80)

Bahá’u’lláh uses the same locution *kham-i-gísú* in another poem:

*Marvel not that the lover hath fallen into His snare*  
 (kamand),

*The necks of the Monarchs of the Spirit are caught in His*  
*wavy locks (kham-i-gísú).* (*Bi-Jánán ján hamí dar-yáft rah*,  
 verse 6, provisional translation by the author and Ms. Mardani)

The covenant of love that binds the lover to his Beloved is eternal. The lover has tied his “*heart to the curl of ... [His] tresses (kham-i-gísú),*” so “*that it may not be unloosed till the Judgment Day (rúz-i-shumár).*” This covenant implies that the lover entirely forgets his self, and yearns to make whatever his Beloved wishes. Historical examples of people who betrayed this covenant of love are, in the Christian Dispensation, Judas Iscariot and, in the Bahá’í Dispensation, Muḥammad ‘Alí.

## 26

*Man án nay-am kih pícham sar az ‘ishq-at,*

*Gar bi-kushand-am bi-damí sad hizár.<sup>30</sup>*

*Should I be slaughtered a myriad times,*

*Still I wouldn’t rebel against Your love.*

This verse has already been commented upon.

## 27

*Shab dar átash-i-gham zán<sup>31</sup> mí-súzam,*

*Kih na-dídí sar-am, ay Dúst,<sup>32</sup> hamí bar sar-i-dár.*

*In the night season I burn in the fire of anguish,*

*'Cause my head hasn't been, O Friend, hung on the gallows.*

The theme of the gallows (*dár*), a sign of ignominy in the Muslim world, is introduced in this verse. Bausani explains that the wish to die on the gallows, that is ignominiously, for the Beloved “is not the “redemption” or expiation or more or less hypothetical sins in the Christian sense but is felt primarily as “supreme ignominy” and therefore, in the metaphysical capsizing of values, as supreme glory and joy” (*Religion in Iran* 279). This image falls within the *malámatí* vein of Persian mystical poetry, which also comprises the image of wine and drunkenness, immoral in the Islamic world that interdicts any kind of alcoholic beverage.<sup>33</sup> As to the wish to die for the Beloved, it has been discussed while commenting upon verses 22 and 24.

## 28

*Tá bí-jasad bi-bínam Rúy-at, ay Aḥad,*

*Bí-ḥijáb áyam bar-at, ay Kirdigár.<sup>34</sup>*

*I come with no veil before Thee to behold, O Almighty,*

*Thy face beyond any mortal frame, O Unique One.*

This distich has been already commented upon.

## 29

*Aṭyár-i-Baqá bi-áshyán bar-gashtand,*

*Má mándih dar ín turáb basí dhalíl-u khwár.<sup>35</sup>*



*The Birds of Eternity returned to their nest,  
We remained downtrodden and wretched on earth.*

This distich has already been commented upon.

## 30

*Vaqt-i-án ámad kih bi-farází ‘alam.*<sup>36</sup>

*Ay SIRR-i-Khudá, dastí az Ghayb bar ár.*

*The time hath come for the banner to be hoisted.*

*O Mystery of God! Draw forth Thy hand from the  
Unseen,*

Bahá'u'lláh's discouragement as voiced in verse 30 has lasted for just a verse. In distich 30 the Poet shows once again the courage and strength that characterized Him throughout His life. This distich also has strong mystical connotations. The first hemistich is a call to revelation:

*The time hath come for the banner (‘alam) to be hoisted.*

The call continues in the second hemistich,

*O Mystery of God! Draw forth Your hand from the Unseen  
(Ghayb)*

with its allusion to the white hand outstretched by Moses, that has already been commented upon. As to the raising of His standard, He wrote later on: “*He it is at Whose bidding the standard (ráyat) of the Most Exalted Word hath been lifted up in the world of creation, and the banner of “He doeth whatsoever He willeth” raised amidst all peoples*” (ESW1; *Lawḥ-i Mubárah-i-khaṭáb* 1).

## 31

*Tá raháni*<sup>37</sup> *khákyán-rá Tú*<sup>38</sup> *zi*<sup>39</sup> *khák,*

*Ham zidá’í*<sup>40</sup> *záyiniy-i-dil zangár.*

*That Thou mayest discharge the mortals from their clay,  
And cleanse the mirrors of their hearts from their rust.*

As the Beloved will manifest Himself to humankind, He will discharge all the mortals (*khákyán*) from their clay, *khák*, defined by Steingass as “Earth, dust, soil, mould, dirt ... the earth as element; the grave; anything of little value, or useless” (Steingass 440), or, as Bahá’u’lláh wrote later on: “He, in truth, hath offered up His life as a ransom for the redemption of the world” (GWB315, sec. CXLVI, para.1). He will “*cleanse the mirrors of their hearts (áyniy-i-dil) from their rust (zangár),*” that is from “*the obscuring dust (ghubárát-i-tírih) of all acquired knowledge, and the allusions of the embodiments of satanic fancy*” (KI192, para.213; KMI149). He will “*cleanse the mirrors (mirát) of ... [human] hearts from the dross of the world (dunyá) and all that is therein, that they may reflect the resplendent light of God*” (Súriy-i-Mulúk 210, sec.5, para.57, Súratu’l-Mulúk 52). The image of the human heart as a mirror may be found in a number of poems by Rúmí who writes:

The soul (*ján*) resembles a clear mirror (*á’iniy-i-şáfi*); the body (*tan*) is dust (*gard*) upon it ... (*Selected Poems* 236nXIII.15; *Díván*, “Tarjî’át,” no.21, v.8)

It may be also found in the Seven Valleys where Bahá’u’lláh writes:

*A pure heart is as a mirror (á’inih); cleanse it with the burnish of love and severance from all save God, that the true sun may shine within it and the eternal morning dawn. Then wilt thou clearly see the meaning of “Neither doth My earth nor My heaven contain Me, but the heart of My faithful servant containeth Me.” And thou wilt take up thy life in thine hand, and with infinite longing cast it before the new Beloved One. (SV21-22; Haft Vádí 113)*

## 32

*Ham Tú zi qayd-i-ín<sup>41</sup> jahán bi-rahán,*

*Ín jumlih muhájarín-u<sup>42</sup> anşár.*

*From the shackles of this world, O Thou,*

*Release all these pilgrims and companions.*

The divine Revelation delivers all men “*from the narrow confines of ... [their] prison in this gloomy plane*” (GDM49, para.67), releases “*the necks of men from chains (salásil) and fetters (aṭnáb),*” and causes “*them to turn, with sincere faces, towards His face, Who is the Mighty, the Bounteous*” (Súriy-i-Haykal: Náşiri’-d-Dín Sháh 133, sec.1, para.268; *Áthár* 1:85). As to “*pilgrims and companions*” the locution has already been explained.

## 33

*Bar sar-ishán nih az táj-i-qabúl<sup>43</sup> tájí,*

*Bar haykal-ishán bar-band zi ḥubb<sup>44</sup> zunnár.*

*Attire their heads with the crown of acceptance,*

*Gird up their temples with the girdle of love.”*

The first hemistich has already been commented upon. As to the image of the crown in the first hemistich, the image “*the crown of acceptance (táj-i-qabúl)*” falls within the symbolism of royalty often associated with the worlds of God. The Manifestation of God is often described as a Sovereign and all such symbols of royalty, as the reign, the throne, the sceptre, the crown, the ring, the treasuries, the court, etc., are associated with Him. Bahá’u’lláh wrote in two of His prayers: “*O God, my God! Attire mine head with the crown of justice, and my temple with the ornament of equity*” (ESW12-13); and: “*Attire my head with the crown of martyrdom, even as Thou didst attire my body with the ornament of tribulation before all that dwell in Thy land*” (PM20, sec.17, para.1). As to the locution

the “*girdle of love* (ḥubb zunnár),” the highest form of love is one’s love for the Manifestation. Bahá’u’lláh wrote: “*The essence of love (ḥubb) is for man to turn his heart to the Beloved One, and sever himself from all else but Him, and desire naught save that which is the desire of his Lord*” (Aṣḥ-i-Kullu’l-Khayr 155; *Majmú’ih* 92, para.6).

The motif of the *zunnár* is usually part of the *malámatí* vein. Browne writes that the *zunnár* “(Zonarium), regarded by the Muslim poets as the symbol of misbelief, represents the Kushtí, or “Kosti,” of the Zoroastrians, the sacred thread of the Brahmins, and presumably the cord worn round the waist by Christian monks” (*Literary History* 3:342n1). Bausani explains that the *zunnár* is “the mark of heresy non-Muslims wore” (*Religion in Iran* 268). Ḥafiz specifically writes, in a *malámatí* vein, that he wears the *zunnár* under his frock:

A darvish garment (*dalq*), I had; and it concealed a hundred faults:

For wine (*may*) and the minstrel (*muṭrib*), the *khairka* (*khirqih*)<sup>45</sup> was pawned; and the mystical cord (*zunnár*) (of a hundred faults) remained. (*Díván* 341, “Gḥazalyát,” no.177, v.3; *Díván* 186, no.178, v.9)

However, Nurbakhsh writes: “In Sufi terminology, the cincture indicates strength and steadfastness of service, integrity of inner and outer being, adherence to the way of certitude, and service to the Master. It also alludes to the girdling of one’s loins in the service of God” (3:238). The Sufi poet Mahmúd Shabistarí (ca.1288-ca.1339) writes in this vein in his *Garden of Mystery* (*Gulshān-i-Ráz*): “The tying of the belt signifies service and obedience” (158, v.881).

### 34

*Bas kun, Darvishá, zín bísh ma-zan nish*<sup>46</sup>

*Kuftád shārar hamí az ín*<sup>47</sup> *guftár.*

*That's enough, O Dervish, don't torment us any longer,  
 'Cause many sparks have fallen from these words.*<sup>48</sup>

This poem, like others of His poems, ends with a call to silence. The same formula, “*enough (bas kun)*,” is also used by Rûmî. For example, he ends a *ghazal* as follows:

How long will you essay to describe Him? For He comes  
 not within description; Make enough (*bas kun*), that I  
 may ride over my commotion. (*Mystical Poems* 1:60, no.66,  
 v.13; *Díván*, “*Ghazalyát*,” no.543, v.13)

He writes moreover:

*Enough (bas kun), why are you so attached to words?  
 Love (‘ishq) has many expressions (bayán) that transcend  
 any utterance. (Díván, “Ghazalyát,” no.410, v.13)*

This distich may hint at the fact that the time had not yet arrived when He could announce His Divine Mission. And the sentence “*Many sparks (sharar) have fallen from your discourse*” may also mean that the words He had already written and partly spread among His Sufi admirers, could have kindled a premature fire, revealing His true identity as a Manifestation of God in a time when people was not ready to receive the revelation of His Word. As He later wrote, “*a spark (jidhviḥ) of the fire of Thy love (muḥabbat) is enough to set ablaze a whole world*” (PM244, sec.153, para.1; *Munáját* 165).

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For a general introduction to this and other poems by Bahá’u’lláh see Julio Savi, “Bahá’u’lláh’s Persian poems written before 1863,” in *Lights of Irfan* 13 (2012): 317-361.

- <sup>2</sup> (Saḥar ámad) A poem composed by Bahá'u'lláh. The Persian text used for this provisional translation is published in *Ishráq-Khávarí, Má'idíy-i-Asmání* 4:181-84. The poem also is published in *Majmú'iy-i-Áthár* 30:163-65. This translation has been done with the precious assistance of Ms. Faezeh Mardani Mazzoli, lecturer of Persian language at the University of Bologna, translated by Julio Savi.
- <sup>3</sup> For more details see Julio Savi, "A Hymn to Love (*Sáqí bi-dih ábí*)."
- <sup>4</sup> One of the four Arabic iambic metres.
- <sup>5</sup> See Julio Savi, "A Hymn to Love (*Sáqí bi-dih ábí*)" 4-6.
- <sup>6</sup> Koran 57:3.
- <sup>7</sup> See Julio Savi, "A Hymn to Love (*Sáqí bi-dih ábí*)" 24-5, provisional translation by the author and Ms. Mardani.
- <sup>8</sup> Steingass defines *muhájarín* as "The fugitive followers of Muhammad from Mecca to Madínah" (Steingass 1351). He defines *anşár* as "Assistants, friends, helpers, auxiliaries, applied particularly to the citizens of Madína, who assisted Muhammad when obliged to fly from Mecca" (Steingass 111).
- <sup>9</sup> *Majmú'ih* 30 omits this invocation.
- <sup>10</sup> *Majmú'ih* 30 writes *kay* at the beginning of the second hemistich.
- <sup>11</sup> Nicholson gives the following translation: "Love hath estrangement with (is a stranger to) the two worlds: in it are two-and-seventy madness" (M3:4719).
- <sup>12</sup> Nicholson gives the following translation: "Beyond doubt, O worshipful one, I must become mad for three days at the beginning of every month. // Hark, to-day is the first of the triduum: 'tis the day of triumph (*pírúz*), not (the day of) turquoise (*pírúzá*)" (*Mathnavi* 5:1888).
- <sup>13</sup> *Majmú'ih* 30 omits *az*.
- <sup>14</sup> *Majmú'ih* 30 writes *súy*.
- <sup>15</sup> *Majmú'ih* 30 writes *Gah páyat píchídih hamí*.
- <sup>16</sup> *Majmú'ih* 30 writes *dar*.
- <sup>17</sup> *Majmú'ih* 30 writes *Az átash-i-áh-at*.
- <sup>18</sup> *Majmú'ih* 30 writes 'abídí.
- <sup>19</sup> *Majmú'ih* 30 omits *tú*.
- <sup>20</sup> *Majmú'ih* 30 writes *Ghaltídan-i-zárí*.
- <sup>21</sup> *Majmú'ih* 30 writes *rangí*.
- <sup>22</sup> *Majmú'ih* 30 omits *kih*.
- <sup>23</sup> *Majmú'ih* 30 omits this verse.
- <sup>24</sup> *Majmú'ih* 30 writes *bi-ráh-at*, that is "in Thy path."
- <sup>25</sup> *Majmú'ih* 30 writes *bar kúh-u dar-u dash-t*, that is "through mountains, wastes and plains."

- <sup>26</sup> *Majmú'ih* 30 writes *jafáy-at*.
- <sup>27</sup> *Majmú'ih* 30 writes *jám*, that is “a cup.”
- <sup>28</sup> *Majmú'ih* 30 writes *gíram bi-kinár*.
- <sup>29</sup> *Majmú'ih* 30 omits this verse.
- <sup>30</sup> *Majmú'ih* 30 omits this verse.
- <sup>31</sup> *Majmú'ih* 30 writes *az án*.
- <sup>32</sup> *Majmú'ih* 30 omits *ay Dúst*.
- <sup>33</sup> Marcello Perego, an Italian expert on Sufism, defines the *malámatí* Sufis as “persons who observe a perfect religious conduct, but carefully hide any ecstatic state (*Aṭwál*) and grace (*Wáridát*) which the One Being bestows upon them; they dissemble their good deeds, so that none but God may know them” (151). Most Sufis of the *malámatiyya* tried to appear blameworthy in the eyes of common people.
- <sup>34</sup> *Majmú'ih* 30 omits this verse.
- <sup>35</sup> *Majmú'ih* 30 writes *dar ín ‘álam-i-fání bas khár*, that is “downtrodden in this ephemeral world.”
- <sup>36</sup> *Majmú'ih* 30 writes *Ámad vaqtí kih ‘alam bi-farází*.
- <sup>37</sup> *Majmú'ih* 30 writes *bi-rahání*.
- <sup>38</sup> *Majmú'ih* 30 omits *Tú*.
- <sup>39</sup> *Majmú'ih* 30 writes *az*.
- <sup>40</sup> *Majmú'ih* 30 writes *bi-zidá’i*.
- <sup>41</sup> *Majmú'ih* 30 writes *Ham az qayd-i-dú*.
- <sup>42</sup> *Majmú'ih* 30 writes *Ay Dúst, Tú ín muhájirin-i-*.
- <sup>43</sup> *Majmú'ih* 30 writes *táj-i-laqá*, that is “the crown of Thy presence.”
- <sup>44</sup> *Majmú'ih* 30 writes *ṭubbat*.
- <sup>45</sup> “The Sufi cloak used to be the dress of the dervishes of a *khánaqáh* (Sufi house). It was a patched garment given by the master to the disciple to wear ... [it] was ... the sign of submission to God” (Nurbakhsh 5:32).
- <sup>46</sup> *Majmú'ih* 30 writes *nísh*.
- <sup>47</sup> *Majmú'ih* 30 writes *bi-ján zín*.
- <sup>48</sup> After this distich, *Ishráq-Khávarí*’s text, *Má’idih* 4:181-4, records the word *intihá....*, “Termination, end, extremity; utmost point or limit, summit; utmost extent; completion” (Steingass 105).

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE  
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

24 July 2013

Transmitted by email: [secretariat@cdnbnc.org](mailto:secretariat@cdnbnc.org)

The National Spiritual Assembly  
of the Bahá'ís of Canada

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has recently completed a series of consultations on the intellectual life of the Bahá'í community and its greater involvement in the life of society. It has asked that we convey to you the following reply, further to your enquiry dated 3 March 2010 regarding the Association for Bahá'í Studies.

Since its establishment in North America in 1975, the Association for Bahá'í Studies has made a valued contribution to the development of the Bahá'í community, and gradually, a network of chapters or related structures devoted to promoting scholarly activity emerged in different parts of the world. Although the approach varied according to resources and circumstances in particular countries, the Associations addressed a range of similar issues. Among these were fostering appreciation for the importance of personal study of the Revelation, correlating the teachings with contemporary thought, defending the Cause, encouraging young believers in their academic pursuits, attracting the interest and involvement of non-Bahá'í academics to the extent possible, and providing a forum for Bahá'í academics to collaborate with one another, thereby helping to raise capacity among those who participate within a wide range of disciplines and, particularly, in specific fields associated more directly with the study of the Faith, such as history, the study of religion, and translation.

In 1996, the Bahá'í world began to focus on a prodigious effort to better understand and systematize its work of expansion and consolidation, of growth and community building. Much has been learned that has profoundly influenced the pattern of activity in which the community is engaged. The Association for Bahá'í Studies, meanwhile, continued to address certain areas that are complementary to the activities unfolding within the recent series of Plans. “There are a host of elements that comprise Bahá'í community life, shaped over the decades, which must be further refined and developed,” the House of Justice wrote in a message dated 27 December 2005. It is timely, then, to reflect upon the many years of experience of the Association, the coherence of its undertakings with the major areas of action in which Bahá'ís are engaged, and the possibilities for the most productive avenues of endeavour in the future.

The House of Justice has observed that Bahá'ís will increasingly become involved in the discourses of society within clusters where the process of growth rises in intensity and at the national level, on topics selected by the National Assembly. At the same time, it noted

that there are “a great many Bahá'ís who are engaged as individuals in social action and public discourse through their occupations”. Every believer has the opportunity to examine the forces operating in society and introduce relevant aspects of the teachings within the discourses prevalent in whatever social space he or she is present. It is, perhaps, as a means to enhance the abilities of the friends to explore such opportunities in relation to their scholarly interests that the endeavours of the Association for Bahá'í Studies can be conceived. Through the specialized settings it creates, the Association can promote learning among a wide range of believers across a wide range of disciplines.

Central to the effort to advance the work of expansion and consolidation, social action, and the involvement in the discourses of society is the notion of an evolving conceptual framework, a matrix that organizes thought and gives shape to activities and which becomes more elaborate as experience accumulates. It would be fruitful if the elements of this framework most relevant to the work of the Associations for Bahá'í Studies can be consciously and progressively clarified. In this respect, it may be useful to give consideration to insights that have contributed to the community's progress: the relationship between study and action, the need for focus, which is not to be confused with uniformity, the challenge of fostering the capacity of individuals and accompanying others in service, the dynamics of organic development, the institutional arrangements necessary to sustain ever more complex patterns of activity, the coherence required among all areas of endeavour, and sound relations among individuals, the community, and the institutions. Perhaps the most important of these is learning in action; the friends participate in an ongoing process of action, reflection, study, and consultation in order to address obstacles and share successes, re-examine and revise strategies and methods, and systematize and improve efforts over time.

One of the critical aspects of a conceptual framework that will require careful attention in the years ahead is the generation and application of knowledge, a topic that those gathered at the conference of the Association for Bahá'í Studies will explore in August. At the heart of most disciplines of human knowledge is a degree of consensus about methodology—an understanding of methods and how to use them appropriately to systematically investigate reality to achieve reliable results and sound conclusions. Bahá'ís who are involved in various disciplines—economics, education, history, social science, philosophy, and many others—are obviously conversant and fully engaged with the methods employed in their fields. It is they who have the responsibility to earnestly strive to reflect on the implications that the truths found in the Revelation may hold for their work. The principle of the harmony of science and religion, faithfully upheld, will ensure that religious belief does not succumb to superstition and that scientific findings are not appropriated by materialism. The friends who seek to excel in scholarly activity will, of course, strive to live up to the high expectations set forth by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Whatever the extent of their achievements, they are an integral part of the community; they are not exempt from obligations placed upon any believer and, at the same time, deserve the community's understanding, forbearance, support, and respect.

As unity of thought around essential concepts emerges, the Association may find it useful to explore fresh approaches with some simple steps that can grow in complexity. Gradually, those aspects of the conceptual framework pertaining to intellectual inquiry in diverse fields will become clearer and grow richer. For example, a number of small seminars could be held to assist individuals from certain professions or academic disciplines to examine some aspect of the discourse of their field. Specific topics could be selected, and a group of participants with experience could share articles, prepare papers, and consult on contemporary perspectives and

related Bahá'í concepts. Special interest groups, such as philosophy or religious studies, could have gatherings to intensify their efforts. Periodic communications or follow-up meetings could be arranged to increase the effectiveness of the participation of these groups of individuals in aspects of the discourse in their chosen fields. Focus could also be directed toward those areas in the academic literature pertaining to the Faith that are ignored or dealt with in a misleading or problematic manner. In addition, existing activities, such as the hosting of a large conference, may be reimagined. Of course, continued exertions must be directed toward preparing and disseminating articles, periodicals, and books.

One additional point will be central to these reflections. The training institute is pivotal in the development of the capacity of veteran and new believers for active involvement in the work of expansion and consolidation. Beyond this, the institute provides the structure for an educational process with three distinct stages that will increasingly serve cohorts of individuals from age six into adulthood. In the experience offered by the institute, participants are not merely presented with information, but through study of the courses and involvement in the community-building activities in which their lessons find practical expression, they acquire knowledge, skills, and spiritual insights that enable them to effectively foster personal and social change. Yet, whatever the scope of its curriculum and no matter how fundamental it is to the progress of the community, involvement in the institute is only a part of a lifetime of inquiry in which these friends will be engaged—one that will include exploration of the Revelation as well as various disciplines of knowledge. The upcoming youth conferences, which will draw tens of thousands of young people, are representative of swelling numbers who, shaped by the institute process at the dawning of their maturity, will set their footsteps firmly in the path of learning and action that will extend throughout their academic studies and beyond. The House of Justice looks to rising generations of Bahá'ís to wholeheartedly address a wide range of intellectual challenges, overcome all pitfalls and obstacles, and render service for the betterment of the world. In the decades ahead, then, a host of believers will enter diverse social spaces and fields of human endeavour. To this arena, pregnant with possibilities, the Association for Bahá'í Studies can offer an important contribution.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

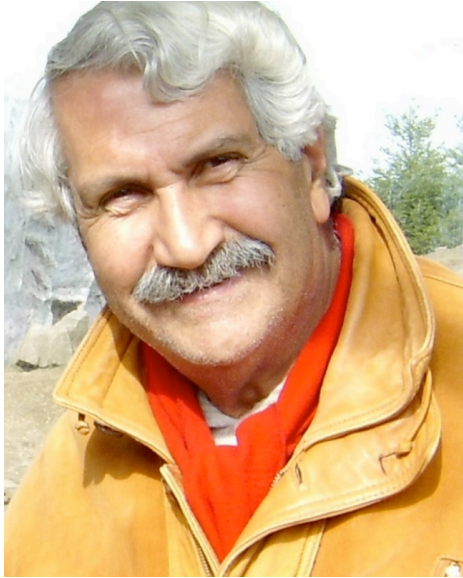
Department of the Secretariat

cc: International Teaching Centre  
Board of Counsellors in the Americas  
Counsellor Ann Boyles  
Counsellor Borna Nouredin  
Counsellor Daniel Scott  
National Assembly of Alaska  
National Assembly of the United States

# In Memoriam

**Kamran Ekbal**

**1946-2014**



Dr. Kamran Ekbal joined the initial group who started annual sessions of the 'Irfán Colloquium in 1993. During the past twenty years, he actively participated at many annual sessions of the colloquium in English, Persian and German and presented a number of research papers in those languages on various topics. He shall be remembered for his spirited presentations at the Irfan Colloquium sessions.<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the idea of initiating the 'Irfán Colloquium project was the result of a friendly conversation of Dr. Iraj Ayman with Dr. Udo Schaefer and Dr. Kamran Ekbal that took place in



a sunny afternoon in the Summer of 1993 in the Garden of the Landegg Academy.

Kamran Ekbal was born on 19 March 1946 in Beirut. Paternally, he was a descendant of Muhammad Mustafa Baghdadi, one of the 19 apostles of Bahá'u'lláh. On his mother's side, he was a descendant of a noble family. His mother, Moukarram al-Muluk Sarabandi-Ekbal, was a princess of Qajar dynasty and was a direct descendant of the Qajar sovereign Fath-Ali Shah. She arranged that Persian language remained the spoken language of the family members who were living in an Arab environment, Lebanon. Thus Kamran felt more comfortable using Persian language.

In 1963 Kamran left Beirut for Germany when he was only 17 years old. He joined his two elder sisters who were already studying in that country. Kamran first started studying psychology in Graz (Austria) and Hamburg (Germany). It was in Hamburg University that he changed his field of study to history and Islamic studies. There, he had the opportunity to become a lecturer of Arabic and Persian languages. He continued his advanced studies at Cambridge and Keil universities and in 1976 he received his Ph.D. degree and continued working as a lecturer in Arabic and Persian languages. In 1979, Kamran Ekbal became a faculty member at Department of History at the Ruhr-University in Bochum (RUB) and later served as the head of the Division of History of the Near and Middle East until his retirement in 2011. During this period he also was a visiting professor at the university of Essen.

Dr. Ekbal delivered many lectures and made paper presentations at academic conferences and congresses and published many articles and research papers, both in Germany and abroad. For more than ten years, he was an elected member of the union of teaching staff (GEW) and supported the rights of his colleagues at the university of Bochum.

In 2006 he was diagnosed as having cancer and underwent several surgeries as well as years of sustained chemo therapy. But instead of giving up, he took strength and energy from his family, his wife Huda Baghdadi-Ekbal and his three sons Basil, Ramez and Cyrus, and continued teaching at the university and presenting research papers at different conferences. Even at the time when a healing was no longer in sight, he took on new projects and delivered lectures in Germany and other countries.

Up to the last moment, he worked very intensely and used his remaining strength on working to complete a volume containing 160 Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed in honour of Muhammad Mustafa Baghdadi and another volume on the memoirs of Dr. Zia Baghdadi that hopefully will be published soon. Finally, after a long struggle with cancer, he passed away on 6 October 2014.<sup>2</sup>

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See *Lights of 'Irfán*, Book Fifteen, pp 426-439 and *Safíni-yi 'Irfán*, Book Seventeen, pp 467-477 for some of his articles, some of which are online at <http://irfancolloquia.org/database/author/Ekbal> .

<sup>2</sup> This biographical summary is extracted from a short biography prepared by Ramez Ekbal.

## Appendices

### Bibliography of the Bahá'í Writings and Abbreviations used in this book:

ABL	'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>'Abdu'l-Bahá in London</i>
ADJ	Shoghi Effendi, <i>Advent of Divine Justice</i>
BA	Shoghi Effendi, <i>Bahá'í Administration</i>
BK	<i>Bahíyyih Khánúm, the Greatest Holy Leaf</i>
BP	Compilation, <i>Bahá'í Prayers</i>
BWF	Compilation, <i>Bahá'í World Faith</i>
CC1	<i>Compilation of Compilations</i> , vol.1
CF	Shoghi Effendi, <i>Citadel of Faith</i>
ESW	Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Epistle to the Son of the Wolf</i>
FWU	'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Foundations of World Unity</i>
GDM	Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Gems of Divine Mysteries</i>
GPB	Shoghi Effendi, <i>God Passes By</i>
GWB	Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh</i>
HW	Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Hidden Words</i>
KA	Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Kitáb-i-Aqdas</i>
KI	Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Kitáb-i-Íqán</i>
PB	Bahá'u'lláh, <i>The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh</i>
PDC	Shoghi Effendi, <i>Promised Day is Come</i>
PM	Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Prayers and Meditations</i>
PT	'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Paris Talks</i>
PUP	'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Promulgation of Universal Peace</i>
SAQ	'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Some Answered Questions</i>
SDC	'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Secret of Divine Civilization</i>
SLH	Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Summons of the Lord of Hosts</i>
SVFV	Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys</i>
SWAB	'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá</i>
SWB	The Báb, <i>Selections from the Writings of The Báb</i>
TAB	'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Tablets of Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas</i> , volumes 1-3
TAF	'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Tablet to Auguste Forel</i>
TB	Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas</i>
TN	'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Traveler's Narrative</i>
WOB	Shoghi Effendi, <i>World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters</i>
WT	'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá</i>

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## Vision and Objectives

The Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund was established in 1992 to honor Haj Mehdi Arjmand (1861-1941) and is dedicated to promoting the scholarly study of the Bahá'í Faith. Haj Mehdi Arjmand was a Persian scholar and teacher of the Bahá'í Faith who became well known in Iran for his profound knowledge of the Bible, Qur'an, and Bahá'í scriptures. The primary activity of the Fund is sponsoring 'Irfán Colloquium and its publications.

In 2012, benefiting from the guidance received from the Universal House of Justice, a management board was appointed for this fund by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States to function as a Bahá'í agency and sponsor 'Irfán Colloquia, presently held in North America and Western Europe in English, Persian and German languages.

The 'Irfán Colloquium aims at promoting and supporting systematic studies of fundamental principles of the Bahá'í beliefs, the Writings of the Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith, the interface of the Bahá'í Faith with intellectual schools of thought and religious traditions, and looking at current challenges in human society from the Bahá'í perspective. 'Irfán is a Persian word referring to mystical, theological and spiritual knowledge.

As of June 2015 one hundred and thirty one sessions of colloquia have been held. Papers in English presented or received at the 'Irfán Colloquia are annually published in a series of volumes of the *Lights of 'Irfán*.